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THE

NOVEMBER 1921

BLUE BOOK

MAGAZINE



Beginning the latest and greatest novel by
E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

We are now announcing our **Second Monthly Title Contest**

This one for October—Watch for November

Last month we offered \$5,100 in prizes for the best titles submitted for a story in the September issue of The Red Book Magazine. Thousands of answers have been received from all parts of the country. The prize winners will be announced in the November issue of The Red Book Magazine. Money will be paid to prize winners October 1st.

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There is a story in the October issue of The Red Book Magazine called "And That's That." The Editors have never been quite satisfied with this title.

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(*Note: In case that more than one person submits the title chosen as best, we will pay \$100 to each of the winners.)

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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"The Rajah of Mong Klang" describes a thrilling sequence of adventures in Pacific ports. Mr. Zandt knows well whereof he writes.

Pulling Power By William Harper Dean 58

A joyous story of that remarkable darky Potluck Hewitt, wherein he plunges into some particularly black trouble and then as usual—lands right side up.

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MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER
1921

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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This vivid drama of the mountain country is by the author of "Laughing Johnny Coyne," "The Ghost Dog" and many other well-remembered stories.

The Birmingham God By F. Morton Howard 75

You'll take special pleasure in this latest adventure in villainy of the bad, bold ex-sailors of the *Jane Gladys*.

Tatoosh of Lone Mountain By R. M. and Maverick Terrell 83

Just a dog—but! Seldom have we been privileged to print a more engaging story than this memorable episode of frontier life.

Catlin's Waterloo By Paul Annixter 89

Two knights of the road stray out to the Philippines—and there things happen to them frequently and with speed.

The Devil of the Picuris By Edwin L. Sabin 129

An amazing tale, this—of the Southwestern desert country and of the death of a strange monster that was harrying the Indians.

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 141

New blood enters the dangerous game of international intrigue in this fascinating story. Be sure to read it.

An Exceptional Novelette

The Rose of Gold By Charles Stokes Wayne 154

Against a picturesque Chinese background this fascinating drama hastens from one exciting climax to another and holds you completely absorbed.

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“He’s Lucky” —They say in Denver

But luck alone doesn’t give a man a million-dollar business in five years

THERE are many men in Denver who remember him as a clerk. In those days some of them said: “There is nothing in this idea of Gregory’s that business can be studied at home; it doesn’t get you anywhere.”

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Graduating in 1913, he became assistant pharmacist in the Scholtz Drug Company; and in 1916, when he had become manager of the Branch store, he enrolled with the Alexander Hamilton Institute.

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No. 1



The Great Prince Shan

*A serial novel of thrills and
most ingenious invention.*

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

"A CLUB for diplomats and gentlemen," Prince Karschoff remarked, looking lazily through a little cloud of tobacco smoke around the spacious but almost deserted card-room. "The classification seems comprehensive enough, yet it seems impossible to get even a decent rubber of bridge."

Sir Daniel Harker, a many years retired plenipotentiary to one of the smaller powers, shrugged his shoulders.

"Personally, I have come to the conclusion," he declared, "that the *raison d'être* for the club seems to be passing. There is no diplomacy, nowadays, and every man who pays his rates is a gentleman. Kingley, you are the youngest. Ransack the club and find a fourth."

The Honorable Nigel Kingley smiled lazily from the depths of his easy chair. He was a young man of normal type, long-limbed, clean-shaven, with good features, a humorous mouth and keen gray eyes.

"In actual years," he admitted, "I may have the advantage of you two, but so far as regards the qualities of youth, Karschoff is the youngest man here. Besides, no one could refuse him anything."

"It is a subterfuge," the Prince objected, "but if I must go, I will go presently. We will wait five minutes, in case Providence should be kind to us."

The three men relapsed into silence. They were seated in a comfortable recess of the card-room of the St. Philip's Club. The atmosphere of the apartment seemed redolent with suggestions of faded splen-

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dor. There was a faint perfume of Russian calf from the many rows of musty volumes which still filled the stately bookcases. The oil-paintings which hung upon the walls belonged to a remote period. In a distant corner, four other men were playing bridge, speechless and almost motionless, the white faces of two of them like cameos under the electric light and against the dark walls. There was no sound except the soft patter of the cards and the subdued movements of a servant preparing another bridge table by the side of the three men.

THEN the door of the room was quietly opened and closed. A man of youthful middle-age, carefully dressed, with a large, clean-shaven face, blue eyes, and fair hair sprinkled with gray, came towards them. He was well set up, almost anxiously ingratiating in manner.

"You see now what Providence has sent," Sir Daniel Harker observed.

"It is enough to make an atheist of one, this!" the Prince muttered.

"Any bridge?" the newcomer inquired, seating himself at the table and shuffling one of the packs of cards.

The three men rose to their feet with varying degrees of unwillingness.

"Immelman is too good for us," Sir Daniel grumbled. "He always wins."

"I am lucky," the newcomer admitted, "but I may be your partner; in which case you, too, will win."

"If you are my partner," the Prince declared, "I shall play for five pounds a hundred. I desire to gamble. London is beginning to weary me."

"Mr. Kingley is a better player, though not so lucky," Immelman acknowledged, with a little bow.

"Never believe it, with all due respect to our young friend here," Sir Daniel replied, as he cut a card. "Kingley plays like a man with brain but without subtlety. In a duel between you two, I would back Immelman every time."

Kingley took his place at the table with a little gesture of resignation. He looked across the table to where Immelman sat displaying the card which he had just cut. The eyes of the two men met. A few seconds of somewhat significant silence followed. Then Immelman gathered up the cards.

"I have the utmost respect for Mr. Kingley as an adversary," he said.

The latter bowed a little ironically.

"May you always preserve that sentiment! Today, chance seems to have made us partners. Your deal, Mr. Immelman."

"What stakes?" the Prince inquired, settling himself down in his chair.

"They are for you to name," Immelman declared.

The Prince laughed shortly.

"I believe you are as great a gambler at heart as I am," he observed.

"With Mr. Kingley for my partner, and the game one of skill," was the courteous reply, "I do not need to limit my stakes."

A servant crossed the room, bringing a note upon a tray. He presented it to Kingley, who opened and read it through without change of countenance. When he had finished it, however, he laid his cards face downwards upon the table.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I owe you my most profound apologies. I am called away at once on a matter of urgent business."

"But this is most annoying," the Prince declared irritably.

"Here comes my savior," Kingley remarked, as another man entered the card-room. "Henderson will take my place. Glad I haven't to break you up, after all. Henderson, will you play a rubber?"

The newcomer assented. Nigel Kingley made his adieux and crossed the room. Immelman watched him curiously.

"What is our friend Kingley's profession?" he inquired.

"He has no profession," Sir Daniel replied. He has never come into touch with the sordid needs of these money-grubbing days. He is the nephew and heir of the Earl of Dorminster."

Immelman looked away from the retreating figure.

"Lord Dorminster," he murmured. "The same Lord Dorminster who was in the Government many years ago?"

"He was Foreign Secretary when I was Governor of Jamaica," Sir Daniel answered. "A very brilliant man he was in those days."

Immelman nodded thoughtfully.

"I remember," he said.

NIGEL KINGLEY, on leaving the St. Philip's Club, was driven at once, in the automobile which he found awaiting him, to a large corner house in Belgrave Square, which he entered with the air of

an habitué. The waiting majordomo took him at once in charge and piloted him across the hall.

"His lordship is very much occupied, Mr. Nigel," he announced. "He is not seeing any other callers. He left word, however, that you were to be shown in the moment you arrived."

"His lordship is quite well, I hope?"

"Well in health, sir, but worried, and I don't wonder at it," the man replied, speaking with the respectful freedom of an old servant. "I never thought I'd live to see such times as these."

A man in the early sixties, still good-looking, notwithstanding a somewhat worn expression, looked up from his seat at the library table on Kingley's entrance. He nodded, but waited until the door was closed behind the retreating servant before he spoke.

"Good of you to come, Nigel," he said. "Draw your chair up here."

"Bad news?" the newcomer inquired.

"Damnable!"

THERE was a brief silence, during which Nigel, knowing his uncle's humors, leaned back in his chair and waited. Upon the table was a little pile of closely written manuscripts, and by their side several black-bound code books, upon which the "F. O. Private" still remained, though almost obliterated by time. Lord Dorminster's occupation was apparent. He was decoding a message of unusual length. Presently he turned away from the table, however, and faced his nephew. His hands traveled to his waistcoat pocket. He drew out a cigarette from a thin gold case, lit it and began to smoke. Then he crossed his legs and leaned a little farther back in his chair.

"Nigel," he said, "we are living in strange times."

"No one denies that, sir," was the grave assent.

Lord Dorminster glanced at the calendar which stood upon the desk.

"Today," he continued, "is the twenty-third day of March, nineteen hundred and thirty-four. Fifteen years ago that terrible Peace Treaty was signed. Since then you know what the history of our own country has been. I am not blowing my own trumpet when I say that nearly every man with true political insight has been cast adrift. At the present moment the country is in the hands of a body of highly

respectable and well-meaning men who, as a parish council, might conduct the affairs of Dorminster Town with unqualified success. As statesmen they do not exist. It seems to me, Nigel, that you and I are going to see in reality that specter which terrified the world twenty years ago. We are going to see the breaking up of a mighty Empire."

"Tell me what has happened or is going to happen?" Nigel begged.

"Well, for one thing," his uncle replied, "the Emperor of the East is preparing for a visit to Europe. He will be here probably next month. You know whom I mean, of course?"

"Prince Shan!" Nigel exclaimed.

"Prince Shan of China," Lord Dorminster assented. "His coming links up many things which had been puzzling me. I tell you, Nigel, what happens during Prince Shan's visit will probably decide the destinies of this country, and yet I wouldn't mind betting you a thousand to one that there isn't a single official of the Government who has the slightest idea as to why he is coming, or even that he is coming at all."

"Do you know?" Nigel asked.

"I can only surmise. Let us leave Prince Shan for the moment, Nigel. Now listen. You go about a great deal. What do people say about me—honestly, I mean? Speak with your face to the light."

"They call you a faddist and a scare-monger," Nigel confessed, "yet there are one or two, especially at the St. Philip's Club, diplomatists and ambassadors whose place in the world has passed away, who think and believe differently. You know, sir, that I am among them."

Lord Dorminster nodded kindly.

"Well," he said, "I fancy I am about to prove myself. Seven years ago, it was," he went on reminiscently, "when the new National Party came into supreme power. You know one of their first battle cries—'Down with all secret treaties! Down with all secret diplomacy! Let nothing exist but an honest commercial understanding between the different countries of the world!' How Germany and Russia howled with joy! In place of an English statesman with his country's broad interests at heart, we have in Berlin and Petrograd half a dozen representatives of the great industries, whose object, in their own words, is, I believe, to develop friendly commercialism and a feeling of brother-

hood between the nations. Not only our ambassadors but our secret service were swept clean out of existence. I remember going to Broadley, the day he was appointed Foreign Minister, and I asked him a simple question. I asked him whether he did not consider it his duty to keep his finger upon the pulses of the other great nations, however friendly they might seem, to keep himself assured that all these expressions of good-will were honorable, and that in the heart of the German nation that great craving for revenge which is the natural heritage of the present generation, had really become dissipated. Broadley smiled at me. 'Lord Dorminster,' he said, 'the chief cause of wars in the past has been suspicion. We look upon espionage as a disgraceful practice. It is the people of Germany with whom we are in touch now, not a military oligarchy, and the people of Germany no more desire war than we do. Besides, there is the League of Nations.' Those were Broadley's views then, and they are his views today. You know what I did?"

NIGEL assented cautiously.

"I suppose it is an open secret among a few of us," he observed. "You have been running an unofficial secret service of your own."

"Precisely! I have had a few agents at work for over a year, and when I have finished decoding this last dispatch, I shall have evidence which will prove beyond a doubt that we are on the threshold of terrible events. The worst of it is—well, we have been found out."

"What do you mean?" Nigel asked quickly.

His uncle's sensitive lips quivered.

"You knew Sidwell?"

"Quite well."

"Sidwell was found stabbed to the heart in a café in Petrograd, three weeks ago," Lord Dorminster announced. "An official report of the inquiry into his death informs his relatives that his death was due to a quarrel with some Russian sailors over one of the women of the quarter where he was found."

"Horrible!" Nigel muttered.

"Sidwell was one of those unnatural people, as you know," Lord Dorminster went on, "who never touched wine or spirits and who hated women. To continue. Atcheson was a friend of yours, wasn't he?"

"Of course! He was at Eton with me. It was I who first brought him here to dine. Don't tell me that anything has happened to Jim Atcheson!"

"This dispatch is from him," Lord Dorminster replied, indicating the pile of manuscript upon the table,—“a dispatch which came into my hands in a most marvelous fashion. He died last week in a nursing home in—well, let us say a foreign capital. The professor in charge of the hospital sends a long report as to the unhappy disease from which he suffered. As a matter of fact, he was poisoned."

Nigel Kingley had been a soldier in his youth and he was a brave man. Nevertheless, the horror of these things struck a cold chill to his heart. He seemed suddenly to be looking into the faces of specters, to hear the breath of the winds of destruction.

"That is all I have to say to you for the moment," his uncle concluded gravely. "In an hour I shall have finished decoding this dispatch, and I purpose then to take you into my entire confidence. In the meantime, I want you to go and talk for a few minutes to the cleverest woman in England, the woman who, in the face of a whole army of policemen and detectives, crossed the North Sea yesterday afternoon with this in her pocket."

"You don't mean Maggie?" Nigel exclaimed eagerly.

His uncle nodded.

"You will find her in the boudoir," he said. "I told her that you were coming. In an hour's time, return here."

Lord Dorminster rose to his feet as his nephew turned to depart. He laid his hand upon the latter's shoulder, and Nigel always remembered the grave kindness of his tone and expression.

"Nigel," he sighed, "I am afraid I shall be putting upon your shoulders a terrible burden, but there is no one else to whom I can turn."

"There is no one else to whom you ought to turn, sir," the young man replied simply. "I shall be back in an hour."

CHAPTER II

LADY MAGGIE TRENT, a step-daughter of the Earl of Dorminster, was one of those young women who had baffled description for some years before she commenced to take life seriously.

She was neither fair nor dark, *petite* nor tall. No one could ever have called her nondescript, or have extolled any particular grace of form or feature. Her complexion had defied the ravages of sun and wind, and that moderate indulgence in cigarettes and cocktails which the youth of her day affected. Her nose was inclined to be *retroussé*, her mouth tender but impudent, her gray eyes mostly veiled in expression but capable of wonderful changes. She was curled up in a chair when Nigel entered, immersed in a fashion-paper. She held out her left hand, which he raised to his lips.

"Well, Nigel dear," she exclaimed, "what do you think of my new profession?"

"I hate it," he answered frankly.

She sighed and laid down the fashion-paper resignedly.

"You always did object to a woman doing anything in the least useful. Do you realize that if anything in the world can save this stupid old country, I have done it?"

"I realize that you've been running hideous risks," he replied.

She looked at him petulantly.

"What of it?" she demanded. "We all run risks when we do anything worth while."

"Not quite the sort that you have been facing."

She smiled thoughtfully.

"Do you know exactly where I have been?" she asked.

"No idea," he confessed. "What my uncle has just told me was a complete revelation, so far as I was concerned. I believed, with the rest of the world, what the newspapers announced that you were visiting Japan and China, and afterwards the South Sea Islands, with the Wendercombes."

She smiled.

"Dad wanted to tell you," she said, "but it was I who made him promise not to. I was afraid you would be disagreeable about it. We arranged it all with the Wendercombes, but as a matter of fact I did not even start with them. For the last eight months, I have been living part of the time in Berlin and part of the time in a country-house near the Black Forest."

"Alone?"

"Not a bit of it! I have been governess to the two daughters of Herr Essendorf."

"Essendorf, the president of the German Republic?"

Lady Maggie nodded.

"He isn't a bit like his pictures. He is a huge fat man and he eats a great deal too much. Oh, the horror of those meals!" she added, with a little shudder. "Think of me, dear Nigel, who never eat more than an omelet and some fruit for luncheon, compelled to sit down every day to a *Mittags-essen*! I wonder I have any digestion left at all."

"Do you mean that you were there under your own name?" he asked incredulously.

She shook her head.

"I secured some perfectly good testimonials before I left," she said. "They referred to a Miss Brown, the daughter of Prebendary Brown. I was Miss Brown."

"GREAT heavens!" Nigel muttered under his breath. "You heard about Atcheson?"

She nodded.

"Poor fellow, they got him all right. You talk about thrills, Nigel," she went on. "Do you know that the last night before I left for my vacation I actually heard Essendorf chuckling with his wife about how his clever police had laid an English spy by the heels, and telling her, also, of the papers which they had discovered and handed over. All the time the real dispatch, written by Atcheson when he was dying, was sewn into my corsets. How's that for an exciting situation?"

"It's a man's job, anyhow," Nigel declared.

She shrugged her shoulders and abandoned the personal side of the subject.

"Have you been in Germany lately, Nigel?" she inquired.

"Not for many years," he answered.

She stretched herself out upon the couch and lit another cigarette.

"The Germany of before the war of course I can't remember," she said pensively. "I imagine, however, that there was a sort of instinctive jealous dislike towards England and everything English, simply because England had had a long start in colonization, commerce, and all the rest of it. But the feeling in Germany now, although it is marvelously hidden, is something perfectly amazing. It absolutely vibrates wherever you go. The silence makes it all the more menacing. Soon after I got to Berlin, I bought a copy of the

Treaty of Peace and read it. Nigel, was it necessary to have been so bitterly cruel to a beaten enemy?"

"Logically it would seem not," Nigel admitted. "Actually, we cannot put ourselves back into the spirit of those days. You must remember that it was an unprovoked war, a war engineered for the sheer purposes of aggression. That is why a punitive spirit entered into our subsequent negotiations."

She nodded.

"I expect history will tell us some day," she continued, "that we needed a great statesman of the Beaconsfield type at the peace-table. However, that is all ended. They sowed the seed at Versailles, and I think we are going to reap the harvest."

"After all," Nigel observed thoughtfully, "it is very difficult to see what practical interference there could be with the peace of the world. I can very well believe that the spirit is there, but when it comes to hard facts—well, what can they do? England can never be invaded. The war of 1914 proved that. Besides, Germany now has a representative on the League of Nations. She is bound to toe the line with the rest."

"It is not in Germany alone that we are disliked," Maggie reminded him. "We seem somehow or other to have found our way into the bad books of every country in Europe. Clumsy statesmanship is it, or what?"

"I should attribute it," Nigel replied, "to the passing of our old school of ambassadors. After all, ambassadors are born, not made, and they should be—they very often were—men of rare tact and perceptions. We have no one now to inform us of the prejudices and humors of the nations. We often offend quite unwittingly, and we miss many opportunities of a *rapprochement*. It is trade, trade, trade and nothing else, the whole of the time, and the men whom we send to the different courts to further our commercial interests are not the type to keep us informed of the more subtle and intricate matters which sometimes need adjustment between two countries."

"That may be the explanation of all the bad feeling," Maggie admitted, "and you may be right when you say that any practical move against us is almost impossible. Dad doesn't think so, you know. He is terribly exercised about the coming of Prince Shan."

"I must get him to talk to me," Nigel said. "As a matter of fact, I don't think that we need fear Asiatic intervention over here. Prince Shan is too great a diplomat to risk his country's new prosperity."

"Prince Shan," Maggie declared, "is the one man in the world I am longing to meet. He was at Oxford with you, wasn't he, Nigel?"

"For one year only. He went from there to Harvard."

"Tell me what he was like?" she begged.

"I have only a hazy recollection of him," Nigel confessed. "He was a most brilliant scholar and a fine horseman. I can't remember whether he did anything at games."

"Good-looking?"

"Extraordinarily so. He was very reserved, though, and even in those days he was far more exclusive than our own royal princes. We all thought him clever, but no one dreamed that he would become Asia's great man. I'll tell you all that I can remember about him another time, Maggie. I'm rather curious about that report of Atcheson's. Have you any idea what it is about?"

SHE shook her head.

"None at all. It is in the old Foreign Office cipher and it looks like gibberish. I only know that the first few lines he transcribed gave Dad the jumps."

"I wonder if he has finished it by now."

"He'll send for you when he has. How do you think I am looking, Nigel?"

"Wonderful," he answered, rising to his feet and standing with his elbow upon the mantelpiece, gazing down at her. "But then you are wonderful, aren't you, Maggie? You know I always thought so."

She picked up a mirror from the little bag by her side and scrutinized her features.

"It can't be my face," she decided, turning towards him with a smile. "I must have charm."

"Your face is adorable," he declared.

"Are you going to flirt with me?" she asked, with a faint smile at the corners of her lips. "You always do it so well and convincingly. And I hate foreigners. They are terribly in earnest but there is no *finesse* about them. You may kiss me just once, please, Nigel, the way I like."

He held her for a moment in his arms, tenderly, but with a reserve to which she was accustomed from him. Presently

she thrust him away. Her own color had risen a little.

"Delightful," she murmured. "Think of the wasted months! No one has kissed me, Nigel, since we said good-by."

"Have you made up your mind to marry me yet?" he asked.

"My dear," she answered, patting his hand, "do restrain your ardor. Do you really want to marry me?"

"Of course I do!"

"You don't love me."

"I am awfully fond of you," he assured her, "and I don't love any one else."

She shook her head.

"It isn't enough, Nigel," she declared, "and, strange to say, it's exactly how I feel about you."

"I don't see why it shouldn't be enough," he argued. "Perhaps we have too much common sense for these violent feelings."

"It may be that," she admitted doubtfully. "On the other hand, don't let's run any risk. I should hate to find an affinity, and all that sort of thing, after marriage—divorce in these days is such shocking bad form. Besides, honestly, Nigel, I don't feel frivolous enough to think about marriage just now. I have the feeling that even while the clock is ticking we are moving on to terrible things. I can't tell you quite what it is. I carried my life in my hands during those last few days abroad. I dare say this is the reaction."

He smiled reassuringly.

"After all, you are safe at home now, dear," he reminded her, "and I really am very fond of you, Maggie."

"And I'm quite absurdly fond of you, Nigel," she acknowledged. "It makes me feel quite uncomfortable when I reflect that I shall probably have to order you to make love to some one else before the week is out."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," he declared firmly. "I am not good at that sort of thing. And who is she, anyhow?"

THEY were interrupted by a sudden knock at the door—not the discreet tap of a well-bred domestic, but a flurried, almost an imperative summons. Before either of them could reply, the door was opened and Brookes, the elderly butler, presented himself upon the threshold. Even before he spoke, it was clear that he brought alarming news.

"Will you step down to the library at once, sir?" he begged, addressing Nigel.

"What is the matter, Brookes?" Maggie demanded anxiously.

"I fear that his lordship is not well," the man replied.

They all hurried out together. Brookes was evidently terribly perturbed and went on talking half to himself without heeding their questions.

"I thought at first that his lordship must have fainted," he said. "I heard a queer noise, and when I went in he had fallen forward across the table. Parkins has rung for Doctor Wilcox."

"What sort of noise?" Nigel asked.

"It sounded like a shot," the man faltered.

They entered the library, Nigel leading the way. Lord Dorminster was lying very much as Brookes had described him, but there was something altogether unnatural in the collapse of his head and shoulders and his motionless body. Nigel spoke to him, touched him gently, raised him at last into a sitting position. Something on which his right hand seemed to have been resting clattered on to the carpet. Nigel turned around and waved Maggie back.

"Don't come," he begged.

"Is it a stroke?" she faltered.

"I am afraid that he is dead," Nigel answered simply.

They went out into the hall and waited there in shocked silence until the doctor arrived. The latter's examination lasted only a few seconds. Then he pointed to the telephone.

"This is very terrible," he said. "I am afraid you had better ring up Scotland Yard, Mr. Kingley. Lord Dorminster appears either to have shot himself, as seems most probable," he added, glancing at the revolver upon the carpet, "or to have been murdered."

"It is incredible!" Nigel exclaimed. "He was the sanest possible man, and the happiest, and he hadn't an enemy in the world."

The physician pointed to the revolver. Then he unfastened once more the dead man's waistcoat, opened his shirt and indicated a small blue mark just over his heart.

"That is how he died," he said. "It must have been instantaneous."

TIME seemed to beat out its course in leaden seconds while they waited for the superintendent from Scotland Yard. Nigel at first stood still for some moments.

From outside came the cheerful but muffled roar of the streets, the hooting of motor-horns, the rumbling of wheels, the measured footfall of the passing multitude. A boy went by, whistling; another passed calling hoarsely the news from the afternoon papers. A muffin man rang his bell, a small boy clattered his stick against the area railing. The whole world marched on, unmoved and unnoticed. In this somber apartment alone tragedy reigned in sinister silence. On the sofa, Lord Dorminster, who only half an hour ago had seemed to be in the prime of life and health, lay dead.

Nigel moved towards the writing-table and stood looking at it in wonder. The code-book still remained, but there was not the slightest sign of any manuscript or paper of any sort. He even searched the drawers of the desk without result. Every trace of Atcheson's dispatch, and Lord Dorminster's transcription of it, had disappeared!

CHAPTER III

ON a certain day, some weeks after the adjourned inquest and funeral of Lord Dorminster, Nigel obtained a long-sought-for interview with the Right Honorable Mervin Brown, who had started life as a factory inspector and was now Prime Minister of England. The great man received his visitor with an air of good-natured tolerance.

"Heard of you from Scotland Yard, haven't I, Lord Dorminster?" he said, as he waved him to a seat. "I gather that you disagreed very strongly with the open verdict which was returned at the inquest upon your uncle?"

"The verdict was absolutely at variance with the facts," Nigel declared. "My uncle was murdered, and a secret report of certain doings on the Continent, which he was decoding at the time, was stolen."

"The medical evidence scarcely bears out your statement," Mr. Mervin Brown pointed out drily, "nor have the police been able to discover how any one could have obtained access to the room, or left it without leaving some trace of their visit behind. Further, there are no indications of a robbery having been attempted."

"I happen to know more than any one else about this matter," Nigel urged,—"more, even, than I thought it advisable

to mention at the inquest—and I beg you to listen to me, Mr. Mervin Brown. I know that you considered my uncle to be in some respects a crank, because he was seeing enough to understand that under the seeming tranquillity abroad there is a universal and deep-seated hatred of this country."

"I look upon that statement as misleading and untrue," The Minister declared. "Your late uncle belonged to that mischievous section of foreign politicians who believed in secret treaties and secret service, and who fostered a state of nervous unrest between countries otherwise disposed to be friendly. We have turned over a new leaf, Lord Dorminster. Our efforts are all directed towards developing an international spirit of friendliness and trust."

"Utopian, but very short-sighted," Nigel commented. "If my uncle had lived to finish decoding the report upon which he was engaged, I could have offered you proof not only of the existence of the spirit I speak of, but of certain practical schemes inimical to this country."

"The papers you speak of have disappeared," Mr. Mervin Brown observed with a smile.

"They were taken away by the person who murdered my uncle," Nigel insisted.

The Right Honorable gentleman nodded.

"Well, you know my views about the affair," he said. "I may add that they are confirmed by the police. I am in no way prejudiced, however, and am willing to listen to anything you may have to say which will not take you more than a quarter of an hour," he added, glancing at the clock upon his table.

"**H**ERE goes, then," Nigel began. "My uncle was a statesman of the old school who had no faith in the Utopian program of the present Government of this country. When you abandoned any pretense of a Continental secret service, he at his own expense instituted a small one of his own. He sent two men out to Germany and one to Russia. The one sent to Russia was the man Sidwell, whose murder in a Petrograd café you may have read of. Of the two sent to Germany, one has disappeared, and the other died in hospital, without a doubt poisoned, a few days after he had sent the report to England which was stolen from my uncle's desk. That report was brought over by Lady

Maggie Trent, Lord Dorminster's step-daughter, who was really the brains of the enterprise and under another name was acting as governess to the children of Herr Essendorf, president of the German Republic. Half an hour before his death, my uncle was decoding this dispatch in his library. I saw him doing it, and I saw the dispatch itself. He told me that so far as he had gone already, it was full of information of the gravest import; that a definite scheme was already being formulated against this country by an absolutely unique and dangerous combination of enemies."

"Those enemies being?"

Nigel shook his head.

"That I can only surmise," he replied.

"My uncle had only commenced to decode the dispatch when I last saw him."

"Then I gather, Lord Dorminster," the Minister said, "that you connect your uncle's death directly with the supposed theft of this document?"

"Absolutely!"

"And the conclusion you arrive at, then?"

"Is an absolutely logical one," Nigel declared firmly. "I assert that other countries are not falling into line with our lamentable abnegation of all secret service defense, and that, in plain words, my uncle was murdered by an agent of one of these countries, in order that the dispatch which had come into his hands should not be decoded and passed on to your Government."

The Right Honorable gentleman smiled slightly. He was a man of some natural politeness, but he found it hard to conceal his incredulity altogether.

"Well, Lord Dorminster," he promised, "I will consider all that you have said. Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"Yes," Nigel replied boldly. "Induce the Cabinet to reestablish our Intelligence Department and secret service, even on a lesser scale, and don't rest until you have discovered exactly what it is they are plotting against us somewhere on the Continent."

"To carry out your suggestions, Lord Dorminster," the Minister pointed out, "would be to be guilty of an infringement of the spirit of the League of Nations, the existence of which body is, we believe, a practical assurance of our safety."

Nigel rose to his feet.

"As man to man, sir," he said, "I see

you don't believe a word of what I have been telling you."

"As man to man," the other admitted pleasantly, as he touched the bell, "I think you have been deceived."

NIGEL, even as a prophet of woe, was a very human person and withal a philosopher. He strolled along Piccadilly and turned into Bond Street, thoroughly enjoying one of the first spring days of the season. Flower sellers were busy at every corner, the sky was blue, with tiny flecks of white clouds, there was even some dust stirred by the little puffs of west wind. He exchanged greetings with a few acquaintances, lingered here and there before the shopwindows, and presently developed a fit of contemplation engendered by the thoughts which were all the time at the back of his mind. Bond Street was crowded with vehicles of all sorts, from wonderfully upholstered automobiles to the resuscitated victoria. The shopwindows were laden with the treasures of the world, buyers were plentiful, promenaders multitudinous. Every one seemed to be cheerful but a little engrossed in the concrete act of living. Nigel almost ran into Prince Karschoff, at the corners of Grafton Street.

"Dreaming, my friend?" the latter asked quietly, as he laid his hand upon Nigel's shoulder.

"Guilty," Nigel confessed. "You are an observant man, Prince. Tell me whether anything strikes you about the Bond Street of today, compared with the Bond Street of, say, ten years ago?"

The Russian glanced around him curiously. He himself was a somewhat unusual figure in his distinctively cut morning-coat, his carefully tied cravat, his silk hat, black-and-white-check trousers and faultless white spats.

"A certain decline of elegance," he murmured. "And is it my fancy or has this country become a trifle Americanized as regards the headgear of its men? What do you think about it?"

Nigel smiled.

"I believe our thoughts are moving in the same groove," he said. "To me there seems to be a different class of people here, as though the denizens of West Kensington, suddenly enriched, had come to spend their money in new quarters. Not only that, but there is a difference in the wares set out in the shops, an absence of taste,

if you can understand what I mean, as though the shopkeepers themselves understood that they were catering for a new class of people."

"It is the triumph of your *bourgeoisie*," the Russian declared. "Your aristocrat is no longer able to survive. *Noblesse oblige* has no significance to the shopman. He wants the fat checks, and he caters for the people who can write them. Let us pursue our reflections a little farther and in a different direction, my friend," he added, glancing at his watch. "Lunch with me at the Ritz, and we will see whether the cookery, too, has been adapted to the new tastes."

Nigel hesitated for a moment, a somewhat curious hesitation which he many times afterwards remembered.

"I am not very keen on restaurants for a week or two," he said doubtfully. "Besides, I had half promised to be at the club."

"Not today," Karschoff insisted. "To-day let us listen to the call of the world. Woman is at her loveliest in the spring. The Ritz restaurant will look like a bouquet of flowers. Perhaps 'one for you and one for me.' At any rate, one is sure of an omelet one can eat."

The two men turned together towards Piccadilly.

CHAPTER IV

LUNCHEON at the Ritz was an unexpectedly pleasant meal. The two men sat at a table near the door and exchanged greetings with many acquaintances. Karschoff, who was in an unusually loquacious frame of mind, pointed out many of the habitués of the place to his companion.

"I am become a club and restaurant loungee in my old age," he declared, a little bitterly,—“almost a *boulevardier*. Still, what else is there for a man without a country to do?"

"You know everybody," Nigel replied, without reference to his companion's lament. "Tell me who the woman is who has just entered?"

Karschoff glanced in the direction indicated, and for a moment his somewhat saturnine expression changed. A smile played upon his lips, his eyes seemed to rest upon the figure of the girl half-turned away from them, with interest, almost with

pleasure. She was of an unusual type, tall and dark, dressed in black with the simplicity of a nun, with only a little gleam of white at her throat. Her hair—so much of it as showed under her flower-garlanded hat—was as black as jet, and yet, where she stood in the full glare of the sunlight, the burnish of it was almost wine-colored. Her cheeks were pale, her expression thoughtful. Her eyes, rather heavily lidded, were a deep shade of violet. Her mouth was unexpectedly soft and red.

"Ah, my friend, no wonder you ask!" Karschoff declared with enthusiasm. "That is a woman whom you must know."

"Tell me her name?" Nigel persisted with growing impatience.

"Her name," Karschoff replied, "is Naida Karetsky. She is the daughter of the man who will probably be the next president of the Russian Republic. You see, I can speak those words without a tremor. Her father at present represents the shipping interests of Russia and England. He is one of the authorized consuls."

"Is he of the party?"

Karschoff scrutinized the approaching figures through his eye-glass and nodded.

"Her father is the dark, broad-shouldered man with the square beard," he indicated. "Immelan, as you can see, is the third. They are coming this way. We will speak of them afterwards."

Naida, with her father and Oscar Immelan, left some acquaintances with whom they had been talking and, preceded by a *maitre d' hôtel*, moved in the direction of the two men. The girl recognized the Prince with a charming little bow and was on the point of passing on when she appeared to notice his companion. For a moment she hesitated. The Prince, anticipating her desire to speak, rose at once to his feet.

"Mademoiselle," he said, bending over her hand, "welcome back to England! You bring with you the first sunshine we have seen for many days."

"Are you being meteorological or complimentary?" she asked, smiling. "Will you present your companion? I have heard of Mr. Kingley."

"With the utmost pleasure," the Prince replied. "Mr. Kingley, through the unfortunate death of a relative, is now the Earl of Dorminster—Mademoiselle Karetsky."

Nigel, as he made his bow, was con-

scious of an expression of something more than ordinary curiosity in the face of the girl who had herself aroused his keenest interest.

"You are the son, then," she inquired, "of Lord Dorminster, who died about a month ago?"

"His nephew," Nigel explained. "My uncle was, unfortunately, childless."

"I met your uncle once in Paris," she said. "It will give me great pleasure to make your better acquaintance. Will you and my dear friend here," she added, turning to the Prince, "take coffee with us afterwards? I shall then introduce you to my father. Oscar Immelman you both know, of course."

They murmured their delighted assent, and she passed on.

NIGEL watched her until she took her place at the table.

"Surely that girl is well-born?" he observed. "I have never seen a more delightful carriage."

"You are right," Karschoff told him. "Karetsky is a well-to-do man of commerce, but her mother was a Baroness Kolchekoff, a distant relative of my own. The Kolchekoffs lived on their estates, and as a matter of fact, we never met. Naida has gone over to the people, though, body and soul."

"She is extraordinarily beautiful," Nigel remarked.

His companion was swinging his eyeglass back and forth by its cord.

"Many men have thought so," he replied. "For myself, there is antagonism in my blood against her. I wonder whether I have done well or ill in making you two acquainted."

Nigel felt a sudden desire to break through a certain seriousness which had come over his own thoughts and which was reflected in the other's tone. He shrugged his shoulders slightly and filled his glass again.

"Every man in the world is the better," he propounded, "for adding to the circle of his acquaintances a beautiful woman."

"Sententious and a trifle inaccurate," the Prince objected with a sudden flash of his white teeth. "The beauty which is not for him has been many a man's undoing. But seriously, my quarrel with Naida is one of prejudice only. She is the confidante and the inspiration of Matinsky, and though one realizes, of

course, that so long as there is a Russian Republic there must be a Russian president, I suppose I should scarcely be human if I did not hate him."

"Surely," Nigel queried, "she must be very much his junior?"

"Matinsky is forty-four," Karschoff said. "Naida is twenty-six or twenty-seven. The disparity of years, you see, is not so great. Matinsky, however, is married to an invalid wife, and concerning Naida I have never heard one word of scandal. But this much is certain. Matinsky has the blindest confidence in her judgment and discretion. She has already been his unofficial ambassador in several capitals of Europe. I am convinced that she is here with a purpose. But enough of my country-people. We came here to be gay. Let us drink another bottle of wine."

The joy of living seemed for a moment to reassert itself in Karschoff's face. His momentary fierceness, reminiscent of his Tartar ancestry, had passed, but it had left a shadow behind.

"At least one should be grateful," he conceded a moment later, "for the distinction such a woman as Naida Karetsky brings into a room like this. Our Bond-Street lament finds its proof here. Except for their clothes—so ill-worn, too, most of them—the women here remind one of Blackpool, and their men of Huddersfield. I am inclined to wish that I had taken you to Soho."

Nigel shook his head. His eyes had strayed to a distant corner of the room, where Naida and her two companions were seated.

"We cannot escape anywhere," he declared, "from this overmastering wave of mediocrity. A couple of generations and a little intermarriage may put things right. A Chancellor of the Exchequer with genius, fifteen years ago, might even have prevented it."

"You can claim, at any rate, a bloodless and unapparent revolution," the Prince observed. "You chivied your aristocracy of birth out of existence with yellow papers, your aristocracy of mind with a devastating income tax. This is the class whom you left to gorge—the war profiteers. I hope that whoever writes the history of these times will see that it is properly illustrated."

In the lounge, they had barely seated themselves before Naida, with her father

and Immelan, appeared. The little party at once joined up, and Naida seated herself next to Nigel. She talked very slowly, but her accent amounted to little more than a prolongation of certain syllables, which had the effect of a rather musical drawl. Her father, after the few words of introduction had been spoken, strolled away to speak to some acquaintances, and Immelan and the Prince discussed with measured politeness one of the commonplace subjects of the moment. Naida and her companion became almost isolated.

"I met your uncle once," Naida said, "at a dinner-party in Paris. I remember that he attracted me. He represented a class of Englishman of whom I had met very few, the thinking aristocrat with a sense for foreign affairs. It was some years ago, that. He remained outside politics, did he not, until his death?"

"Outside all practical politics," Nigel assented. "He had his interests, though."

She looked at him thoughtfully.

"Have you inherited them?" she asked.

He declined the challenge of her eyes. After all, she belonged to the Russia whose growing strength was the greatest menace to European peace, and whose attitude towards England was entirely uncertain.

"My uncle and I were scarcely intimate," he said. "I was never really in his confidence."

"Not so much so as Lady Maggie Trent? She would be your cousin?"

"It is not a relationship of blood," Nigel replied. "Lady Maggie was the daughter of my uncle's second wife."

"She is very charming," Naida murmured.

"I find her delightful," Nigel agreed.

"She is not only charming, but she has intelligence," Naida continued.

"I think that Lord Dorminster was very fond of her, that he trusted her with many of his secrets."

"Had he secrets?" Nigel asked.

SHE remained for a moment very thoughtful, smoking a thin cigarette through a long holder, and watching the little rings of smoke.

"You are right," she said at last. "I find your attitude the only correct one. Did you know that Maggie was a friend of mine, Lord Dorminster?"

"I can very well believe it," he answered,

"but don't recall ever having heard her speak of you."

"Ah! But she has been away for some months. You have not seen much of her, perhaps, since her return?"

"Very little," he acquiesced. "She only arrived in London just before my uncle's death, and since then I have had to spend some time at Dorminster."

"As a matter of curiosity," Naida inquired, "when do you expect to see her again?"

"This afternoon, I hope," he replied.

"Then you will give her a little message for me, please?"

"With great pleasure!"

"Tell her from me—mind she understands this, if you please—that she is not to leave England again until we have met."

"Is this a warning?" he asked.

She looked at him searchingly.

"I wonder," she reflected, "how much of you is Lord Dorminster's nephew."

"And I, in my turn," he rejoined with sudden boldness, "wonder how much of you is Matinsky's envoy."

She began to laugh softly.

"We shall perhaps be friends, Lord Dorminster," she said. "I should like to see more of you."

"You will permit me to call upon you?" he begged eagerly.

"Will you come? We are at the Milan Court for a little time. My father is trying to get a house. My other sister is coming over to look after him. I am unfortunately only a bird of passage."

"Then I shall not run the risk of missing you," he declared. "I shall call very soon."

IMMELAN intervened—grim, suspicious, a little disturbed. For some reason or other, the meeting between these two young people seemed to have made him uneasy.

"Your father has desired me to present his excuses to Lord Dorminster," he announced, "and to escort you back to the Milan. He has been telephoned for from the Consulate."

Naida rose to her feet with some apparent reluctance.

"You will not delay your call too long, Lord Dorminster?" she enjoined, as she gave him her hand. "I shall expect you the first afternoon you are free."

"I shall not delay giving myself the pleasure," he assured her.

She nodded and made her adieux to the Prince. The two men stood together and watched her depart with her companion.

"Really, one gains much through being an onlooker," the Prince reflected. "There go the spirit of Russia and the spirit of Germany. You dabble in these things, my friend Dorminster. Can you guess what they are met for—for whom they wait?"

"I might guess," Nigel replied, "but I would rather be told."

"They wait for the master spirit," Karschoff declared, taking his arm. "They wait for the great Prince Shan."

CHAPTER V

NIGEL and Maggie had tea together in the little room which the latter had used as a boudoir. They were discussing the question of her future residence there.

"I am afraid," he declared, "that you will have to marry me."

"It would have its advantages," she admitted thoughtfully. "I am really so fond of you, Nigel. I should be married at St. Mary Abbot's, Kensington, and have the Annersley children for bridesmaids. Don't you think I should look sweet in old gold and orange blossoms?"

"Don't tantalize me," he begged.

"We really must decide upon something," she insisted. "I hate giving up my rooms here, I should hate having my worthy aunt as resident *duenna*, and I suppose it would be gloriously improper for us two to go on living here if I didn't. Are you quite sure that you love me, Nigel?"

"I am not quite so sure as I was this morning," he confessed, holding out his cup for some more tea. "I met a perfectly adorable girl today at luncheon at the Ritz. Such eyes, Maggie, and the slimmest, most wonderful figure you ever saw!"

"Who was the cat?" Maggie inquired with asperity.

"She is Russian. Her name is Naida Karetsky. Karschoff introduced me."

Maggie was suddenly serious. There was just a trace of the one expression he had never before seen in her face—fear—lurking in her eyes, even asserting itself in her tone.

"Naida Karetsky?" she repeated. "Tell me exactly how you met her?"

"She was lunching with her father and Oscar Immelman. She stopped to speak to Karschoff and asked him to present me. Afterwards, she invited us to take coffee in the lounge."

"She went out of her way to make your acquaintance, then?"

"Yes, I suppose she did."

"You know who she is?"

"The daughter of one of the Russian consuls over here, I understood."

"She is more than that," Maggie declared nervously. "She is the inspiration of the president himself. She is the most vital force in Russian politics. She is the woman whom I wanted you to know, to whom I told you that I wished you to pay attentions. And now that you know her, I am afraid."

"Where did you meet her?" he asked curiously.

"We were at school together in Paris. She was two years older than I, but she stayed there until she was twenty. Afterwards we met in Florence."

Nigel was greatly interested.

"Somehow or other, nothing that you can tell me about her surprises me," he admitted. "She has the air of counting for great things in the world. She is very beautiful, too."

"She is beautiful enough," Maggie replied, "to have turned the head of the great Paul Matinsky himself. They say that he would give his soul to be free to marry her. As it is, she is the uncrowned czarina of Russia."

Nigel frowned slightly.

"Isn't that going rather a long way?" he objected.

"Not when one remembers what manner of a man Matinsky is," Maggie replied. "He may have his faults, but he is an absolute idealist so far as regards his private life. There has never been a word of scandal concerning him and Naida, nor will there ever be. But in his eyes, Naida has that most wonderful gift of all—she has vision. He once told a man with whom I spoke in Berlin that Naida was the one person in the world to whom a mistake was impossible. Nigel, did she give you any idea at all what she was over here for?"

"Not as yet," he replied, "but she has asked me to go and see her."

"Did she seem interested in you personally, or was it because your name is Dorminster?"

Nigel sighed.

"I hoped it was a personal interest, but I cannot tell. She asked me whether I had inherited my uncle's hobby."

"What did you tell her?" she asked eagerly.

"Very little. She seemed sympathetic, but after all she is in the enemy camp. She and Immelan seemed on particularly good terms."

"Yet I don't believe that she is committed as yet," Maggie declared. "She always used to speak so affectionately of England. Nigel, do you think that I have vision?"

"I am sure that you have," he answered.

"Very well, then, I will tell you what I see," she continued. "I see Naida Karetzky for Russia, Oscar Immelan for Germany, Austria and Sweden, and Prince Shan for Asia—here—meeting in London—within the next week or ten days, to take counsel together to decide whether the things which are being plotted against us today shall be or shall not be. Of Immelan we have no hope. He conceals it cleverly enough, but he hates England with all the fervor of a zealot. Naida is unconvinced. She is to be won. And Prince Shan—"

"Well, what about him?" Nigel demanded, a little carried away by Maggie's earnestness.

SHE shook her head.

"I don't know," she confessed. "If the stories one hears about him are true, no man nor any woman could ever influence him. At least, though, one could watch and hope."

"Prince Shan is supposed to be coming to Paris, not to London," Nigel remarked.

"If he goes to Paris," Maggie said, "Naida and Immelan will go. So shall we. If he comes here, it will be easier. Tell me, Nigel, did you see the Prime Minister?"

"I saw him," Nigel replied, "but without the slightest result. He is clearly of the opinion that the open verdict was a merciful one. In other words, he believes that it was a case of suicide."

"How wicked!" Maggie exclaimed.

"I suppose it is trying the ordinary Britisher a little high," Nigel remarked, "to ask him to believe that he was murdered in cold blood, here in the heart of London, by the secret agent of a foreign power. The strangest part of it all is

that it is true. To think that those few pages of manuscript would have told us exactly what we have to fear! Why, I actually had them in my hand."

"And I in my corsets!" Maggie groaned.

They were both silent for a moment. Then Nigel moved towards the door and opened it.

"Come downstairs into the library, will you, Maggie?" he begged. "Let us go in for a little reconstruction."

They found Brookes in the hall and took him with them. The blinds in the room had never been raised, and there was still that nameless atmosphere which lingers for long in an apartment which has become associated with tragedy. Instinctively they all moved quietly and spoke in hushed voices. Nigel sat in the chair where his uncle had been found dead, and made a mental effort to reconstruct the events which must have immediately preceded the tragedy.

"I know that this was all thrashed out at the inquest, Brookes," he said, "but I want you to tell me once more. You see how far it is from this table to the door. My uncle must have had abundant warning of anyone approaching. Was there no other way by which anyone could have entered the room?"

"There was, your lordship," the man replied, "and I have regretted several times since that I did not mention it at the inquest. The cleaners were here on the morning of that day, and the window at the farther end of the room was unfastened—I even believe that it was open."

Nigel rose and examined the window in question. It was almost flush with the ground, and although there were iron railings separating it from the street, a little gate opening from the area entrance made ingress not only possible but easy. Nigel returned to his chair.

"I can't understand this not having been mentioned at the inquest, Brookes," he said.

"I was waiting for the question to be asked, your lordship. It was perfectly clear to everyone there, if your lordship will excuse my saying so, that both the coroner and the police seemed to have made up their minds that it was a case of suicide."

Nigel nodded.

"I had the same idea with reference to the coroner, at any rate, Brookes," he

said. "So long as the verdict was returned in the form it was, I am not sure that it was not better so."

He dismissed the man with a little nod and sat turning over the code-books which still stood upon the table.

"You and I, at any rate, Maggie, know the truth," he said, "and so long as we can get no help from the proper quarters, I think that we should do better to let the matter remain as it is. We don't want to direct people's attention to us. We want to lull suspicion so far as we can, to be free to watch the three."

The telephone bell rang, and as Nigel moved his arm to take off the receiver, he knocked over one of the black, morocco-bound code-books. A sheet of paper with a few words upon it came fluttering to the ground. Maggie picked it up, glanced at it carelessly at first and then with interest.

"Nigel," she exclaimed, "you see whose handwriting this is? Could it be part of the decoded dispatch?"

The telephone inquiry had been unimportant. Nigel pushed the instrument away. They both looked eagerly at the page of manuscript paper. It was numbered "8" at the top, and the few words written upon it in Lord Dorminster's writing were obviously the continuation of a paragraph:

The name of the middle one, then, of the three secret cities, into which at all costs some one must find his way, is Kroten, and the telephone number which is all the clue I have been able to get, up to the present, to the London end of the affair, is Mayfair 146.

"This is just where he got to in the decoding!" Nigel declared. "I wonder whether it's any use looking for the rest."

They searched through every page of the heavy code-books in vain. Then they returned to their study of the single page. Nigel got out an atlas and studied it.

"Kroten," he muttered. "Here it is,—a small place about six hundred miles from Petrograd, apparently the center of a barren, swampy district, population thirty thousand, birth-rate declining, industries nil. Cheerful sort of spot it seems!"

"I have more luck than you!" Maggie cried, her finger tracing out a line in the open telephone book. "Look!"

Nigel glanced over her shoulder and read the entry to which she was pointing: *Immelan, Oscar, 13 Clarges Street, W. Mayfair 146.*

CHAPTER VI

NIGEL played golf at Ranelagh, on the following Sunday morning, with Jere Chalmers, a young American in the diplomatic service, who had just arrived in London and brought a letter of introduction to him. They had a pleasant game, and strolled off from the eighteenth green to the dressing-rooms on the best of terms with each other.

"Say, Dorminster," his young companion enjoined, "let's get through this fixing-up business quickly. I've had a kind of feeling for a drink, these last four holes, which I can't exactly put into words. Besides, I want to have a word or two with you before the others come down."

"I sha'n't be a minute," Nigel promised. "I'm going to change into flannels after lunch—that is, if you don't mind playing a set or two at tennis. My cousin-in-law, Maggie Trent, whom you'll meet at luncheon, is rather keen, and she doesn't care about golf."

"I'm game for anything," the other agreed, lifting his head spluttering from the basin. "Gee, that's good! Get a move on, there's a good fellow. I have a fancy for just five minutes with you out on the lawn, with the ice chinking in our glasses."

Nigel finished smoothing his hair, and the two men strolled through the hall, gave an order to a red-coated attendant, and found a secluded table under a marvelous tree in the gardens on the other side. Chalmers had become a little thoughtful.

"Dorminster," he declared, "yours is a wonderful country."

"Just how is it appealing to you at the moment?" Nigel inquired.

"I'll try and tell you," was the meditative reply. "It's your extraordinary *insouciance*. It seems to me, as a budding diplomat, that you are running the most ghastly risks on earth."

"In what direction?"

The young American shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you've got a thoroughly democratic Government—not such a bad Government, I should say, as things go. They've bled your *bourgeoisie* a bit, and

serve 'em right, but with an Empire to keep up you're losing all touch upon international politics. Your ambassadors have been exchanged for trade consuls, the whole of your secret service staff has been disbanded, you place your entire faith on this sacred League of Nations. Say, Dorminster, you're taking risks!"

"You mustn't forget," Dorminster replied, "that it was your country who started the League of Nations."

"President Wilson did," Chambers grunted. "You can't say that the country ever backed him up. That's the worst of us on the other side—we so seldom really get a common voice."

"The League of Nations was then a thundering good idea," Nigel declared, "but it belongs to Utopia and not to this vulgar planet."

"Just so," Chalmers rejoined, "and yet you are about the only nation who ever took it to her bosom and suckled it. To be perfectly frank with you, now, what other nation in the world is there, except yours, which is obeying the conventions strictly? I tell you frankly, we keep our eye open on Japan, and we build a good many commercial ships which would astonish you if you examined them thoroughly. Our National Guard, too, know a bit more about soldiering than their grandfathers. You people, on the other hand, seem to have become infatuated pacifists. I can't tell tales out of school, but I don't like the way things are going on eastwards. Asia means something different now that that amazing fellow, Prince Shan, has made a great nation of China."

"I am entirely in accord with you," Nigel agreed, "but what is one to do about it? Our present Government has a big majority, trade at home and abroad is prosperous, the income tax is down to a shilling in the pound and looks like being out altogether. Everybody is fat and happy."

"Just as they were in 1914," Chalmers remarked significantly.

"More so," Dorminster asserted. "In those days we had our alarmists. Nowadays, they too seem to have gone asleep. My uncle—"

"Your uncle was an uncommonly shrewd man," Chalmers interrupted. "I was going to talk about him."

"After lunch," Nigel suggested, rising to his feet. "Here comes my cousin and some of her tennis friends. Karschoff is lunch-

ing with us, too. You know him, don't you? Come along and I'll introduce you to the others."

IT was a very cheerful party that, after a few minutes under the trees, strolled into luncheon and took their places at the round table reserved for them at the end of the room. Maggie at once took possession of Chalmers.

"I have been so anxious to meet you, Mr. Chalmers," she said. "They tell me that you represent the modern methods in American diplomacy, and that therefore you have been first secretary over the heads of half a dozen of your seniors. How they must dislike you, and how clever you must be!"

"I don't know that I'm so much disliked," the young man answered, with a twinkle in his eyes, "but I flatter myself that I have brought a new note into diplomacy. I was always taught that there were thirty-seven different ways of telling a lie, which is to state a diplomatic fact. I have swept them all away. I tell the truth."

"How daring," Maggie murmured, "and how wonderfully original! What should you say, now, if I asked you if my nose wanted powdering?"

"I should start by saying that the question was outside the sphere of my activities," he decided. "I should then proceed to add, as a private person, that a little dab on the left side would do it no harm."

"I begin to believe," she confessed, "that all I heard of you is true."

"Tell me exactly what you have heard?" he begged. "Leave out everything that isn't nice. I thrive on praise and good reports."

"To begin with, then, that you are an extraordinarily shrewd young man," she replied, "that you speak seven languages perfectly, and you know your way about every capital of Europe, and that you have ideas of your own as to what is going to happen during the next six or seven years."

"You've been moving in well-informed circles," he admitted. "Now shall I proceed to turn the tables upon you?"

"You can't possibly know anything about me," she declared confidently.

"I should tell you what I've discovered from personal observation," he replied.

"That sounds like compliments or candor," she murmured. "I'm terrified of both."

"Well, I guess I'm not out to frighten

you," he assured her. "I'll keep the secrets of my heart hidden—until after luncheon, at any rate—and just ask you how you enjoyed your stay in Berlin?"

Maggie's manner changed. She lowered her voice.

"In Berlin?" she repeated.

"In the household of the erstwhile leather manufacturer, the present president, Herr Essendorf."

"What do you know about my stay in Berlin?" she demanded.

"Everything there is to be known," he answered. "To tell you the truth, our people there were a trifle anxious about you. I was the little angel watching from above."

"You are, without a doubt," Maggie pronounced, "a most interesting young man. We will talk together presently."

"A hint which sends me back to my mutton," the young man observed. "Dorminster," he added, turning to his host, "I heard the other day, on very good authority, that you were thinking of writing a novel. If you are, study the lady who has just entered. There is a type for you, an intelligence which might baffle even your attempts at analysis."

Naida, escorted by her father and Immelman, took her place at an adjacent table. She bowed to Nigel and Karschoff before sitting down, and her eyes traveled over the rest of the party with interest. Then he recognized Maggie and waved her hand.

"Immelman is a very constant admirer," Prince Karschoff remarked a little uneasily.

"Is that her father?" Maggie asked.

The Prince nodded.

"He is one of the ambassadors of commerce from my country," he said. "In place of diplomacy, he superintends the exchange of shipping cargoes and talks freights. I suppose Immelman and he are all the time comparing notes, but I scarcely see where my dear friend Naida comes in."

"There is still the oldest interest in the world for her to fall back upon," Chalmers murmured. "One hears that Immelman is devoted."

"Scandal-monger!" the Prince declared severely. "Young man from the New World," he proceeded, "get on with your lunch and drink your iced water. Let the vision of those two remind you that it was your people who foisted the League of Nations upon us, and be humble, even sorrowful, when you view one of the sad results."

"I can't be responsible, directly or indirectly, for a political flirtation," Chalmers grumbled. "Besides, why should there be any politics about it at all? Mademoiselle Karetsky is quite attractive enough to turn the head even of a seasoned old boulevardier like you, Prince."

"That young man," Karschoff said deliberately, "will find himself before long face to face with a blighted career. He has no respect for age, and he is shockingly lacking in *finesse*. All the same, on one point I am agreed. I don't think there is a man breathing who could resist Naida if she wished to call him to her."

THE little party broke up presently and wandered out into the gardens. They sat for a while upon the lawn, drinking their coffee and exchanging greetings with acquaintances. In the distance, the orchestra was playing soft music, with a fine regard for the atmosphere of the pleasant, almost languorous spring afternoon. Everywhere were signs of contentment, even gaiety, and here the alien streak of unfamiliar newcomers was far less pronounced. When the time came for tennis, Chalmers led the way with Maggie. As soon as they were out of hearing of the others, she turned towards him a little abruptly.

"Tell me exactly what you know about my stay in Berlin?" she demanded.

"Everything," he answered gravely.

"You mean?"

"I mean that the New World today has progressed, where the Old World seems to have been stricken with a terrible blindness. Our secret-service system has never been better, and, frankly, I hear many things which I don't like. I am going to talk to Lord Dorminster this afternoon very seriously, but in the meantime I wanted to speak to you. I heard a rumor that you thought of going back to Berlin."

"I don't know how you heard it, but the rumor is not altogether untrue," she admitted. "I have not yet made up my mind."

"Don't go," he begged.

"You think they really do know all about me?"

"I know that they do. I don't mind telling you that you had the shave of your life on the Dutch frontier last time, and I don't mind telling you, also, that we had two of our men shadowing you. One of them acted on his own initiative, or you would never have crossed the frontier."

"I rather wondered why they left me out," she observed. "Perhaps you can explain why Frau Essendorf keeps on writing to me under my pseudonym of 'Miss Brown' and to my reputed address in Lincolnshire, begging me to return."

"I could tell you that, too," he replied. "They want you back in Berlin."

"They really do know, then, that I brought over the dispatch from Atcheson?" she asked.

"They know it," he assured her. "They know, too, that it was chiefly a wasted labor. Their London agents saw to that."

"Perhaps," she suggested, "you know who their London agents are?"

"Sooner or later in our conversation," he remarked, "we were bound to arrive at a point—"

"Come along and let us make up a set, then," she intervened.

CHAPTER VII

N AIDA, deserted by her father, who had found a taxicab to take him back to the purlieus of Piccadilly and auction bridge, sauntered along at the back of the tennis nets until she arrived at the court where Nigel and his party were playing.

"I should like to watch this game for a few minutes," she told her companion. "The men are such opposite types and yet both so good-looking and Lady Maggie fascinates me."

Immelman fetched two chairs, and they settled down to watch the set. Nigel with his clean, well-knit figure, looked his best in spotless white flannels. Chalmers, a more powerful and muscular type, also presented a fine appearance. The play was fast and sometimes brilliant. Nigel had Maggie for a partner, and Chalmers one of her friends, and the set was as nearly equal as possible. Naida leaned forward in her chair, following every stroke with interest.

"I find this most fascinating," she murmured. "I hope that Lord Dorminster and his cousin will win. Your sympathies, of course, are on the other side."

"You are right," Immelman assented. "My sympathies are on the other side."

There was a lull in the game for a moment or two. The sun was troublesome, and the players were changing courts. Naida turned towards her companion.

"My friend," she said, glancing around as though to be sure that they were not overheard, "there are times when you move me to wonder. In the small things as well as the large, you are so unchanging. I think that you would see an Englishman die, whether he were your friend or your enemy, very much as you kick a poisonous snake out of your path."

"It is quite true," was the calm reply.

"But America was once your enemy," she continued, watching Chalmers' powerful service.

"With America we made peace," he explained. "With England, never. If you would really appreciate and understand the reason for that undying hatred which I and millions of my fellow-countrymen feel, it will cost you exactly one shilling. Go to any stationer's and buy a copy of the Treaty of Versailles. Read it word by word and line by line. It is the most brutal document that was ever printed. It will help you to understand."

She nodded slowly.

"Paul always declares," she said, "that in those days England had no statesmen—no one who could feel what lay beyond the day-by-day horizon. When I think of that Treaty, my friend, I sympathize with you. It is not a great thing to forge chains of hate for a beaten enemy."

"If you realize this, are you not then our friend?" Immelman asked.

She appeared for a few moments to be engrossed in the tennis. Her companion, however, waited for her answer.

"In a way," she acknowledged, "I find something magnificent in your wonderfully conceived plans for vengeance, and in the spirit which has evolved and kept them alive through all these years. Then, on the other hand, I look at home, and I ask myself whether you do not make what they would call over here a cat's-paw of my country."

"Ours is the most natural and most beneficial of all possible alliances," Immelman insisted. "Germany and Russia, hand in hand, can dominate the world."

"I am not sure that it is an equal bargain, though, which you seek to drive with us," she said. "Germany aims, of course, at world power, but you are still fettered by the terms of that Treaty. You cannot build a great fleet of warships or aeroplanes, you cannot train great armies, you cannot lay up for yourself all the store that is necessary for a successful war. So you

bring your brains to Russia and you ask us to do these things, but Russia does not aim at world power. Russia seeks only for a great era of self-development. She, too, has a mighty neighbor at her gates. I am not sure that your bargain is a fair one."

"It is the first time that I have heard you talk like this," Immelman declared, with a little tremor in his tone.

"I have been in England twice during the last few months," Naida said. "You know very well at whose wish I came. I have been studying the conditions here, studying the people so far as I can. I find them such a kindly race. I find their present Government so unsuspicious, so genuinely altruistic. After all, that Treaty belongs to an England that has passed. The England of today would never go to war at all. They believe here that they have solved the problem of perpetual peace."

Immelman smiled a little bitterly.

"Dear lady," he said, "if I lose your help, if you go back to Petrograd and talk to Paul Matinsky as you are talking to me, do you know that you will break the heart of a nation?"

"Paul does not look upon me as infallible," she protested. "Besides, there are other considerations. And now, please, we will talk of the tennis. I do not know whether it is my fancy, but that man there to your left, in gray, seems to me to be taking an interest in our conversation. He cannot possibly overhear, and he has not glanced once in our direction, yet I have an instinct for these things."

Immelman glanced in the direction of the stranger—a quiet-looking, spare man, dressed in a gray tweed suit, clean-shaven and of early middle-age. There was nothing about his appearance to distinguish him from a score or more of other loiterers.

"You are quite right," her companion admitted. "One should not talk of these things even where the birds may listen, but it is so difficult. As for that man, he could not possibly hear, but there might be others. One passes behind on the grass so noiselessly."

They relaxed into silence. Naida, leaning a little forward, became once more engrossed in the play. Her eyes were fixed upon Nigel. It was his movements which she followed, his strokes which she usually applauded. Immelman sat by her side and watched.

"They are well matched," he remarked presently.

"Mr. Chalmers has a wonderful service," she declared, "but Lord Dorminster has more skill. Oh, bravo!"

The set at that moment was finished by a back-handed return from Nigel, which skimmed over the net at a great pace, completely out of reach of the opposing couple. The players strolled across to the seats under the trees. Naida smiled at Nigel, and he came over to her side. Once again he was conscious of that peculiar sense of pleasure and well-being which he felt in her company.

"You play tennis very well, Lord Dorminster."

"I found inspiration," he answered.

"In your partner?"

"Maggie is always charming to play with. I was thinking of the onlookers."

"Mr. Immelman is very interested in tennis," she remarked with a smile which challenged him.

"And you?"

"Even more so."

"Tell me about games in Russia," he begged, seating himself on the grass by her side.

"We have none," she replied. "I learned my tennis at Cannes, where, curiously enough, I saw you play three years ago."

"You were there then?" he asked with interest.

"For a few days only. We were motor-ing from Spain to Monte Carlo. Cannes was very crowded, but you see I remembered."

Her voice seemed to have some lingering charm in it, some curiously potent suggestion of personal interest which stirred his pulses. He looked up and met her eyes. For a moment the world of tennis fields, of pleasant chatter and of holiday-makings, passed away. He rose abruptly to his feet. This time he avoided looking at her.

"You must come over and speak to Maggie," he begged. "Perhaps Mr. Immelman will spare you for a few moments."

Immelman bowed, sphinxlike but coldly furious. The two strolled away together.

WHEN the next set was over, Naida, who had rejoined her companion, had disappeared. On one of their vacated chairs was seated the quiet-looking stranger in gray. Chalmers passed his arm through Nigel's and led him in that direction.

"I want you two to know each other," he said. "Jesson, this is Lord Dorminster—Mr. Gilbert Jesson—Lord Dorminster."

The two men shook hands, Nigel vaguely. He was at first unable to place this newcomer.

"Mr. Jesson," Chalmers explained dropping his voice a little, "was a highly privileged and very much valued member of our Intelligence Department, until he resigned a few months ago. I think that if you could spare an hour or two any time this evening, Dorminster, it would interest you very much to know exactly the reason for Mr. Jesson's resignation."

"I should be very pleased indeed," Nigel replied. "Wont you both come and dine in Belgrave Square tonight? I was going to ask you, anyhow, Chalmers. Naida Karetsky has promised to come, and my cousin will be hostess."

"It will give me very great pleasure," Jesson acquiesced. "You will understand," he added, "that the information which Mr. Chalmers has just given you concerning myself is entirely confidential."

Nigel nodded.

"We three will have a little talk to ourselves afterwards," he suggested. "At eight-o'clock—Number 17, Belgrave Square."

Jesson strolled away after a little desultory conversation. Chalmers looked after him thoughtfully.

"Harmless-looking chap, isn't he," he observed, "yet I'll let you in on this, Dorminster; there isn't another living person who knows so much of what is going on behind the scenes in Europe as that man."

"Why has he chucked his job, then?" Nigel inquired.

"He will tell you that tonight," was Chalmers' quiet reply.

CHAPTER VIII

"I DON'T think I shall marry you, after all," Maggie announced that evening, as she stood looking at herself in one of the gilded mirrors with which the drawing-room at Belgrave Square was adorned. "Why not?" Nigel asked, with polite anxiety.

"You are exhibiting symptoms of infidelity," she declared. "Your flirtation with Naida this afternoon was most pronounced, and you went out of your way to ask her to dine tonight."

"I like that!" Nigel complained. "Sup-

posing it were true, I should simply be obeying orders. It was you who incited me to devote myself to her."

"The sacrifices we women make for the good of the country," Maggie sighed. "However, you needn't have taken me quite so literally. Do you admire her very much, Nigel?"

He smiled. His manner, however, was not altogether free from self-consciousness.

"Of course I do," he admitted. "She's a perfectly wonderful person, isn't she? Let's get out of this Victorian environment," he added, looking around the huge apartment with its formal arrangement of furniture and its atmosphere of prim but faded elegance. "We'll go into the smaller room and tell Brookes to bring us some cocktails and cigarettes. Chalmers wont expect to be received formally, and Mademoiselle Karetsky will appreciate the cosmopolitan note of our welcome."

"We do look a little too domestic, don't we?" Maggie replied, as she passed through the portière which Nigel was holding back. "I'm not at all sure that I ought to come and play hostess like this, without an aunt or anything. I must think of my reputation. I may decide to marry Mr. Chalmers, and Americans are very particular about that sort of thing."

"From what I have seen of him, I should think that Chalmers would make you an excellent husband," Nigel declared, as he rang the bell. "You need a firm hand, and I should think he would be quite capable of using it."

"You take the matter far too calmly," she objected. "I can assure you that I am getting peevish. I hate all Russian women with creamy complexions and violet-colored eyes."

"They are wonderful eyes," Nigel declared, after he had given Brookes an order.

Maggie looked at him curiously.

"Naida is for your betters, sir," she reminded him. "You must not forget that she is to rule over Russia some day."

"Just at present," Nigel observed, "Paul Matinsky has a perfectly good wife of his own."

"An invalid."

"Invalids always live long."

"Presidents and emperors can always get divorces," Nigel insisted, "especially in this irreligious age."

"Matinsky isn't that sort," Nigel said cheerfully. "Even an old gossip like

Karschoff calls him a purist, and you yourself have spoken of his principles."

Maggie shrugged her shoulders.

"All right," she remarked. "If you are determined to rush into danger, I suppose you must. There is just one more point to be considered, though. I suppose you know that if you succeed any farther with Naida, you will introduce a personal note into our coming struggle."

"What do you mean?" Nigel demanded.

"Why, Immelman, of course," she replied. "He's head over ears in love with Naida. Any one can see that."

Nigel laughed scornfully.

"My dear child," he protested, "can you imagine a woman like Naida thinking seriously of a fellow like Immelman—a scheming adventurer, without even the breeding of his class!"

Maggie laughed softly for several moments.

"My dear Nigel," she exclaimed, "what a luxury to get at the man of you! I haven't seen your eyes flash like that for ages. The cocktails, thank goodness! Shake one for me till it froths all the way up the glass, please, and then give me a cigarette."

Nigel obeyed orders, helped himself, and glanced at the clock as Brookes left the room.

"How nice of you to come half an hour early, Maggie!" he remarked.

She made a little grimace.

"The first time you have noticed it," she said dolefully. "Do you realize, Nigel, that it is nearly a week since you proposed to me. Apart from your penchant for Naida, don't you really want to marry me any more?"

He came across the room and stood looking down at her thoughtfully. She was wearing a somewhat daringly fashioned black-lace gown, which showed a good deal of her white shoulders and neck. Her brown hair was simply but artistically arranged. She was *piquante*, alluring, with a provocative smile at the corners of her lips and a challenging gleam in her eyes. The daintiness and femininity of her were enthralling.

"You would make an adorable wife," he reflected.

"For some one else?"

"An unspeakable proposition," he assured her.

"You're very nice-looking, Nigel," she murmured.

"You're terribly attractive, Maggie!"

"Then why is it," she sighed, "that we neither of us want to marry the other?"

"If a serious proposition would really be of interest to you," he began. She made a little grimace.

"You heard them coming," she interrupted.

THE three expected guests arrived almost together, bringing with them, at any rate so far as Chalmers and Naida were concerned, an atmosphere of light-heartedness which was later on to make the little dinner-party a complete success. Naida, too, was in black, a gown simpler than Maggie's but full of distinction. She wore no jewelry except a wonderful string of pearls. Her black hair was brushed straight back from the forehead but drooped a little over her ears. She seemed to bring with her a larger share of girlishness than any of them had previously observed in her, as though she had made up her mind for this one evening to cast herself adrift from the graver cares of life, and to indulge in the frivolities which after all were the heritage of her youth. She sat at Nigel's right hand and plied him with questions as to the lighter side of his life, his favorite sport, books, and general occupation. She gave evidences of humor which delighted everybody, and Nigel, though he would at times have welcomed, and did his best to initiate, an incursion into more serious subjects, found himself compelled to admire the tact with which she continually foiled him.

"It is a mistake," she declared once, "to believe that a woman is ever serious unless she is forced to be. All our natural proclivities are towards gaiety. We are really butterflies by instinct, and we are at our best when we are natural. Don't you agree with me, Maggie?"

"From the bottom of my heart," Maggie assented. "Nothing but conscience ever induces me to pull a long face and turn my thoughts to serious things. And I haven't a great deal of conscience."

"So you see," Naida continued, smiling up at her host, "when you try to get a woman to talk politics or sociology with you, you are brushing a little of the down off her wings. We really want to be told—other things."

"I should imagine," he replied, "that my sex frequently indulged you."

"Not so much as I should desire," she assured him. "I have somehow or other acquired an undeserved reputation for brains. In Russia especially, when I meet strangers, they don't even look at my frock or the way my hair is done. They plunge instead into a subject of which I know nothing—philosophy or history; or international politics."

"Do you know nothing of international politics?" Nigel asked.

"A home thrust," she declared, laughing. "I suppose that is the subject upon which I have some glimmerings of knowledge. Really not very much, though, but then I have a theory about that. I think sometimes that the clearest judgments are formed by some one who comes a little fresh to a subject, some one who hasn't been dabbling in it half their lifetime and acquired prejudices. Do you always provide strawberries for your guests, Lord Dorminster? If so, I should like to come and live here."

"If you will promise to come and live here," he replied, "I will provide strawberries if I have to start a nursery garden."

"Maggie," Naida announced across the table, "Lord Dorminster has proposed to me. The matter of strawberries has brought us together. I don't think I shall accept him. There are no means of making him keep his bargain."

"He'd make an awfully good husband," Maggie declared. "If no one else wants me, I shall probably marry him myself some day."

Naida shook her head.

"Lord Dorminster is more my type," she declared. "Besides, you have had your chance if you really wanted him. I have a great friend in Russia who prophesies that I shall never marry. That does not please me. I think not to be married is the worst fate that can happen to any woman."

"The remedy," Nigel told her, "is in your own hands."

JESSON, quieter than the others, was still an interesting personality, often intervening with a shrewd remark, and listening to the sallies of the others with a humorous gleam in his spectacle-shielded eyes. When at last the girls left them for a time, Nigel led the way at once into the library, where coffee and liqueurs were served.

"I expect the others will find their way

here in a few minutes," he said, as the door closed behind Brookes and his satellite. "You had something to say to me, Chalmers, about Mr. Jesson here."

"All that I have to say is in the nature of a testimonial," the young American replied. "Jesson was easily one of our best men in Europe. He resigned a few months ago simply because he wants a job with you fellows."

"I don't quite understand," Nigel began.

"Let me explain," Jesson begged. "I spent the last three years poking about Europe, and so far as the United States are concerned, there's nothing doing. My reports aren't worth much more than the paper they are written on, and while I'm drawing my money from Washington, it's not my business to collect information that affects other countries. That's why I've sent in my resignation. There are great events brewing eastwards, Lord Dorminster, and I want to take a hand in the game."

"You want to work for us?" Nigel asked.

"You're right," was the quiet reply. "I guess that's how I've figured it out. You see, I'm one of those Americans who still consider themselves half English. Next to the United States, Great Britain is the country for me. I know what I'm talking about, Lord Dorminster, and I've come to the conclusion that there's a lot of trouble in store for your people."

"I'm pretty well convinced of that myself," Nigel agreed, "but you know how things are with us. We have a democratic Government who have placed their whole faith in the League of Nations, and who are absolutely and entirely anti-militarist. On paper, the governments of Russia, Germany and most of the other countries of Europe, are of the same ilk. Some of us—my uncle was one—who have studied history and who know something of the science of international politics, realize perfectly well that no empire can be considered secure under such conditions. This country swarms with foreign secret-service men. What they are planning against us, heaven knows!"

"Heaven and Naida Karetsky," Chalmers intervened softly.

"You believe that she is our enemy?" Nigel asked, a look of trouble in his eyes.

"She is Immelman's friend," Chalmers reminded him.

"There was a man named Atcheson," Jesson began quietly.

Nigel nodded.

"He was one of the men my uncle sent out. The first one was stabbed in Petrograd. Jim Atcheson was poisoned and died in Berlin."

"There was rather a scare in a certain quarter about Atcheson," Jesson observed. "He was supposed to have got a report through to the late Lord Dorminster."

"He got it through all right," Nigel replied. "My uncle was busy decoding it, seated in this room, at that table, when he died."

"His death was very sudden," Jesson ventured.

"I have not the faintest doubt but that he was murdered," Nigel declared. "The document upon which he was working disappeared entirely, except for one sheet."

"You have that one sheet?" Jesson asked eagerly.

NIGEL produced it from his pocket-book, smoothed it out, and laid it upon the table.

"There are two things worth noticing here," he pointed out. "The first is that the actual name of a town in Russia is given, and a telephone number in London. Kroten I have looked up on the map. It seems to be an unimportant place in a very desolate region. The telephone number is Oscar Immelman's."

"That is interesting, though not surprising," Jesson declared. "Immelman, as you of course know, is one of your enemies, one of those who are working in this country for purposes of his own. But as regards Kroten, may I ask where you obtained your information about the place?"

Nigel dragged down the atlas and showed them the paragraph. Jesson read it with a faint smile upon his lips.

"I fancy," he remarked, "that this is a little out of date. I should like, if you have no objection, to start for Kroten this week."

"Good heavens! Why?" Nigel exclaimed.

"I can scarcely answer that question," Jesson said. "I am like a man with a puzzle board and a heap of loose pieces. Kroten is one of those pieces, but I haven't commenced the fitting-in process yet. Here," he went on, "is as much as I can tell you. There are three cities, situated in different countries in the world, which are each in their way connected with danger which is brewing for this country. I

have heard them described as 'the three secret cities.' One is in Germany. I have been there at the risk of my life, and I came away simply puzzled. Kroten is the next, and of the third I have still to discover the whereabouts. Are you willing, Lord Dorminster, to let me act for you abroad? I require no salary or remuneration of any sort. I am a wealthy man, and investigations of this kind are my one hobby. I shall not move without your permission, although I recognize, of course, that your own position is entirely an official one. If you will trust me, however, I promise that all my energies shall be devoted to the interests of this country."

Nigel held out his hand.

"It is a pact," he decided. "Before you leave, I will give you the whole of my uncle's brief correspondence with Sidwell. You may be able to gather from it what he was after. Sidwell, you remember, was stabbed in a café in the slums of Petrograd."

"I remember quite well," Jesson admitted quietly. "I knew Sidwell. He was a clever person in his way, but he relied too much upon disguises. I fancy that I hear the voices of the ladies coming. I shall just have time to tell you rather a curious coincidence."

The two men waited eagerly. Jesson touched with his forefinger the sheet of paper which he had been studying.

"Sidwell," he concluded, "could not have been so far off the mark. The man with whom he was spending the evening in that café was a mechanic from Kroten."

CHAPTER IX

N AIDA, early one afternoon, a few days after the dinner at Belgrave Square, raised herself on one elbow from the sofa on which she was resting, glanced at the roses and the card which the maid presented for her inspection, and waved them impatiently away.

"The gentleman waits," the woman reminded her.

Naida glanced out of the window across a dull and apparently uninviting prospect of roofs and chimneys, to where in the background a faint line of silver and a wheeling flock of sea-gulls became dimly visible through the branches of the distant trees. The window itself was flung wide

open, but the slowly moving air had little of freshness in it. Sparrows twittered around the window-sill, and a little patch of green shone out from the Embankment Gardens. The radiance of spring here found few opportunities.

"The gentleman waits," the serving woman repeated stolidly, speaking in her native Russian.

"You can show him up," her mistress replied, a little wearily.

Immelan entered, a few moments later, spruce and neat in a well-fitting gray suit, and carrying a gray Homburg hat. He was redolent of soaps and perfumes. His step was buoyant, almost jaunty, yet in his blue eyes, as he bent over the hand of the woman upon whom he had come to call, lurked something of the disquietude which, notwithstanding his most strenuous efforts, was beginning to assert itself.

"You make me very happy, my dear Naida," he began, "that you receive me thus so informally. Your good father is smoking on the lounge. He bade me come up."

She beckoned him to a seat.

"A thousand thanks for your flowers, my friend," she said. "Now tell me why you are possessed to see me at this untimely hour? I always rest for a time after luncheon, and I am only here because the sunshine filled my room and made me restless."

"There is a little matter of news," he announced slowly. "I thought it might interest you. I hoped it would."

She turned her head and looked at him.

"News?" she repeated. "News from you means only one thing. Is it good or bad?"

"It is good," he replied, "because it saves me a long and tedious journey, because it saves me also from a separation which I should have found detestable."

"Your journey to China, then, is abandoned?"

"It is rendered unnecessary. Prince Shan has decided after all to adhere to his original plan and come to Europe."

"You are sure?"

"I have an official intimation," he replied. "I may probably have to go to Paris, but no farther. It is even possible that I might leave tonight."

She was genuinely interested.

"There is no one in the whole world," she declared, "whom I have wanted to meet so much as Prince Shan."

"You will not be disappointed," he prom-

ised her. "There is no one like him. When he enters the room, you know that you are in the presence of a great man. The three of us together! Naida, we will remake the map of the world."

She frowned a little uneasily.

"Do not take too much for granted, Oscar," she enjoined. "Remember that I am here to watch and to report. It is not for me to make decisions."

"Then for whom else?" he demanded. "Paul Matinsky himself wrote me that you had his entire confidence—that you possessed full powers for action. You will not be faint-hearted, Naida?"

"I shall never be false to my convictions," she replied.

THERE was a brief silence. He was not altogether satisfied, but he judged the moment unpropitious for any further reference to the coming of Prince Shan.

"My plans, as you see, are changed," he said at last, "and for that reason a promise which I made to myself will not now be kept."

She rose to her feet a little uneasily, shook out her fluffy morning-gown, and retreated towards the door leading to the apartments beyond. He watched her without movement. She picked up a pile of letters from a table in the middle of the room, glanced at them, and threw them down.

"It is as well," she warned him, "to keep all promises."

"As for this one," he replied, "I have no responsibility save to myself. I absolve myself. I give myself permission to speak. Your father is even wishful that I should do so. I crave from you, Naida, the happiness which only you can bring into my life. I ask you to become my wife."

She looked at him without visible change of expression. Her lips, however, were a little parted. The air of aloofness with which she moved through the world seemed suddenly more marked. He would have been a brave man, or one entirely without perceptions, who would have advanced towards her at that moment.

"That is quite impossible," she pronounced.

"I do not admit it," he contended. "No, I will never admit that. The Fates brought us together. It will take something stronger than Fate to drive us apart. I had not meant to speak yet. I had

meant to wait until the great pact was sealed and the glory to come assured, but during these last few days I have suffered. A strange fancy has come to me. I seem to feel something between us, so I speak before it can grow. I speak because without you life for me would be a thing not worth having. You are my life and my soul. You will not send me away."

Naida was troubled but unhesitating. It was perhaps at that moment that a hidden characteristic of her features showed itself. Her mouth, sometimes almost too voluptuous in its softness had straightened into a firm line of scarlet. The deeper violet of her eyes had gone. Thus a woman might have looked who watched suffering unmoved, the woman of the bull- or prize-fight.

"I am glad that you have spoken, Oscar," she said. "I know a thing now which has been a source of doubt and anxiety to me. What you ask is impossible. I do not love you. I shall never love you. A few days ago, I asked myself the very question you have just asked me, and I could not answer it. Now I know."

Pain and anger struggled in his face. He was suffering, without a doubt, but for a moment it seemed as though the anger would predominate. His great shoulders heaved, his hands were clenched until the signet ring on his left finger cut into the flesh, his eyes were like glittering points of fire.

"It is the old dream concerning Paul?" he demanded.

"It has nothing to do with Paul," she assured him. "Concerning him I will admit that I have had my weak moments. I think that those have passed. It was such a wonderful dream," she went on reflectively, "the dream of ruling the mightiest nation in the world, a nation that even now, after many years of travail, is only just finding its way through to the light. It seemed such a small thing that stood in the way. Since then I have met Paul's wife. She does not understand, but at least she loves."

"She is a poor fool, no helpmate for any man," Immelman declared. "Yet it is not his cause I plead, but mine. I, too, can minister to your ambitions. Be my wife, and I swear to you that before five years have passed I will be president of the German Republic. Germany is no strange country to you," he went on passionately. "It is you who have helped in the great

rapprochement. At times when Paul has been difficult, you have smoothed the way. I would not speak against your country; I would not speak against anything which lies close to your heart, but let me tell you that when the day of purification comes, the day when God gives us leave to pour out the vials of vengeance, there will be no prouder, no more glorious people than ours. Our triumph will be yours, Naida. You yourself will help to cement the great alliance of these years."

She shook her head.

"I am a woman," she said simply. "Incidentally, I am a politician and something of an altruist, but when it comes to marriage, I am a woman. I do not love you, Oscar, and I will not marry you."

There was a darker shade upon his face now. Unconsciously he had drawn a little nearer to her.

"Listen," he begged, "it is perhaps possible that I have not been mistaken—that a certain change has crept up in you even within the last few days? Tell me, is there any one else who has found his way into your heart? No, I will not say heart! It could not be your heart in so short a time. Into your fancy? Is there anyone else, Naida, of whom you are thinking?"

"That is my concern, Oscar, and mine only," she answered haughtily.

A weaker woman he would have bullied. His veins were filled with anger. His tongue ached to spend itself. Naida's bearing cowed him. She remained a dominating figure. The unnatural restraint imposed upon himself, however, made his voice sound hard and unfamiliar. There were little patches of white around his mouth; his teeth showed more than usual when he spoke.

"If there were anyone else," he declared, "and that some one else should chance to be an Englishman, I would find a new hell for him."

"There is no one else," she answered calmly, "but if there ever should be, Oscar Immelman, and if you ever interfered with him, either in this country or any other, my arm would follow you around the world. Remember that."

SHE turned away for a moment, eager to gain a brief respite from his darkening face. When she looked around, he was gone. She heard his footsteps passing down the corridor, the bell ringing for the

lift, the clank of the gates as he stepped in. Once more she gazed out over the uninspiring prospect. There was a little more sunshine upon the river; more of the dusty chimney-pots seemed bathed in its silvery radiance. As she stood there, she felt herself growing calmer. The tension passed from her nerves. Her eyes grew soft again. Then an impulse came to her. She stretched out her hand for the telephone book, turned over the pages restlessly, looked through the "D's" until she found the name for which she was searching. For a long time she hesitated. When at last she took up the receiver and asked for a number, she was conscious of a slight thrill, a sense of excitement, which in moments of more complete self-control would at least have served as a warning to her.

CHAPTER X

THE curtain fell upon the first act of "Louise." The lights were turned up, the tenseness relaxed, men made dives for their hats, and the unmusical murmured the usual platitudes. Naida leaned forward from the corner of her box to the man who was her sole companion.

"Father," she said, "I am expecting a caller with whom I wish to speak—Lord Dorminster. If he comes, will you leave us alone? And if anyone else should be here, please take them away."

"More mysteries," her father muttered, not unkindly. "Who is this man Dorminster?"

Naida leaned back in her chair and fanned herself slowly.

"No one I know very much about," she acknowledged. "I have selected him in my mind, however, as being a typical Englishman of his class. I wish to talk to him, to appreciate his point of view. You know what Paul said when he gave you the appointment and sent us over here: 'Find out for me what sort of men these Englishmen are.'"

"Matinsky should know," her father observed. "He was here twelve years ago. He came over with the first commission which established regular relations with the British Government."

"No doubt," she said equably, "he was able to gauge the official outlook, but this country, during the last ten years, has gone

through great vicissitudes. Besides, it is not only the official outlook in which Paul is interested. He doesn't understand, and frankly I don't, the position of what they call over here 'the man in the street.' You see, he must be either a fool, or he must be grossly deceived."

"So far as my dealings with him go, I should never call the Englishman a fool," Karetsky confessed.

"There are degrees and conditions of fools," his daughter declared calmly. "A man with a perfectly acute brain may have simply idiotic impulses towards credulity, and a credulous man is always a fool. Anyhow, I know what Paul wants."

There was a knock at the door. Karetsky opened it and stood aside to let Nigel pass in. Naida held out her hand to the latter with a smile.

"I am so glad that you have come," she said, raising her eyes for a minute to his. "Father, you remember Lord Dorminster?"

The two men exchanged a few commonplace remarks. Then Karetsky reached for his hat.

"Your arrival, Lord Dorminster," he observed, "leaves me free to make a few calls myself. We shall, I trust, meet again."

Nigel murmured a few courteous words and watched the retreating figure with some curiosity.

"Your father is very typical," he declared. "He reminds me of your country itself. He is massive, has suggestions of undeveloped strength."

"Add that he is a little ponderous," Naida said lightly, "slow to make up his mind, but as obstinate as the Urals themselves, and you have described him. Now tell me what you think of a young woman who rings you up without the slightest encouragement and invites you to come to the Opera purposely to visit her box?"

"I deny the absence of encouragement, and I am very grateful for the opportunity of coming," Nigel answered. "And if I were to tell you all that I think of you," he added, after a moment's pause, "it would take me a great deal longer than this quarter of an hour's interval."

THESE were their first few moments absolutely alone. Neither of them was unduly emotional, neither wholly free from experience, yet they looked and spoke and felt as though the coming of new things

was at hand. The atmosphere of music, still present, was a wonderful background to the intensified sensations of which both were conscious. Naida had the utmost difficulty in steadying her voice.

"I wanted to talk to you seriously because you can help me very much if you will," she began. "In a sense, I am over here upon a mission. Some of us in Russia feel that your nation is imperfectly understood there. We are bearing grudges against you which may not be wholly justified. You see, to speak very plainly, we are under the constant influence of a people which cherishes no feelings of friendship towards you."

For a moment the personal element had disappeared. Nigel remembered who his companion was and all that she stood for. He drew his chair a little nearer to hers.

"If you are looking for a typical Englishman," he said, "I fear that I shall be a disappointment to you. The typical Englishman of today is hiding his head in the sand. I am not disposed to do anything of the sort. I recognize a great coming danger, and I am afraid of your country."

"The attitude of the official Englishman I know," she declared, a little eagerly. "What I want to find out is whether there are many like yourself, who are awake."

"I am afraid that I am in the minority," he confessed. "I am trying to carry on the work which my uncle commenced. I am trying to secure firm and definite evidence of a certain plot which I believe to be brewing in your country and in Germany."

"Tell me exactly what you know?" she begged.

NIGEL looked at her for several moments in silence. She was wearing a Russian headdress, a low tiara of bound coils of pearls. A rope of pearls hung from her neck. Her white net gown was trimmed with ermine. At her first appearance in the front of the box she had created almost a sensation among those to whom she was visible. In these darker shadows, the sensuous disturbance of which he had been conscious since his entrance, swept over him once more with overmastering power.

"You are very beautiful," he said, a little abruptly.

"I am glad you think so," she murmured, with a very sweet, answering light in her eyes, "but I am hoping that you have other things to tell me."

"You are the friend of Immelman," he reminded her.

"To some extent, yes," she assented, "but I admit of no prejudices. The greatest friend I have in the world is Paul Matinsky, and it is at his wish that I am here. He is anxious above all things not to make a mistake."

"Your country is very much under the dominance of Germany," he ventured.

"Very much, I admit, but not utterly so. You must remember that after the cataclysm of 1917, Russia has been born again in travail and agony. No hand was outstretched to help her, save that of Germany alone, for her own sake ultimately, perhaps, but nevertheless with invaluable results to Russia. We had vast resources which Germany exploited, magnificent human material which Germany has educated and disciplined. The two nations have grown together for their common interest. At the same time, Paul Matinsky and very many others have always felt that there is one of Germany's great ambitions in which Russia ought not necessarily to become involved. I think—I hope that you understand me."

"In plain words," Nigel said, "you refer to this projected plan of isolating England."

"In plain words, I do," she admitted. "Russia's intentions concerning that are trembling in the balance. Germany is pressing her hard. Nothing will be finally decided until I return to Petrograd. You see, I speak to you quite openly, for I myself have had some experience of your present statesmen. I believe if you were to repeat this conversation to any one of them, if even you could open their eyes to what is happening, they would only shrug their shoulders and say that they relied for their protection on the League of Nations."

"You are unhappily right," Nigel groaned, "yet one perseveres, and after all there is an element of mystery about the whole affair. The French, as you know, have not imitated our blind credulity. Their frontier would seem to be impregnable, and the difficulties of invading England, even from the air, are very much as they were during the last war. It was these considerations which made my uncle persevere in his attempt at secret-service work on the Continent. Everything depends upon our knowing exactly what is in store for us."

"And have you discovered that?" she inquired.

He shook his head.

"Everything that we have learnt so far has been of negative value," he replied. "The German citizen army is large, but not threateningly so. So far as we have been able to discover, they do not seem to have any secret store of guns or ammunition. Their docks hold no secrets. Yet we know that there is something brewing. Both the men upon whom my uncle relied have been murdered."

"But one of them succeeded in getting a dispatch through, did he not?" she asked quietly.

"Yes, he succeeded," Nigel acknowledged. "My uncle was murdered, however, in the act of decoding it, and the dispatch itself was stolen."

"You are very frank," she said. "I suppose I ought to feel flattered that you treat me with so little reserve."

"If you are a friend to Germany," he replied, "you probably know all that I can tell you. If you are inclined towards friendship with us, then it is as well that you should know everything."

"That is reasonable," she admitted. "Now listen. This conversation can only last a few minutes longer. It is true that Oscar Immelan is my father's old friend and also mine, but my judgment in all matters which relate to the welfare of my country is not influenced by that fact."

"There was a report once," Nigel said, taking his courage into both hands, "that you were engaged to be married to him."

She looked him in the eyes. Against the whiteness of her skin, the color of her own seemed more wonderful than ever.

"That is not true," she replied. "It will never be true."

"I am glad," he declared fervently.

There was a brief pause. Both seemed conscious of a renewal of that air of disturbance which had reigned between them during their first few moments alone. It was Naida who made an effort to restore their conversation to its former tone.

"If Germany has any scheme against this country," she said, "believe me, it will not be so obvious as you seem to think. It will be a scheme which can only be carried out with the assistance of other countries, and that assistance is not yet wholly promised. I cannot betray to you my knowledge of certain things," she went on, after a moment's hesitation, "but I can at least give you this warning. It is not for his health alone that Prince Shan is flying from China to Paris. If there is a single member of your Government who has the least apprehension of world politics, now is the time for action."

"There is no one," Nigel answered gloomily.

THE box was suddenly invaded. Karet-sky reappeared with several other men. In the rear of the little procession came Immelan. His face darkened as he recognized Nigel. Naida looked across at him with a slight frown upon her forehead.

"You have changed your mind?" she remarked. "I thought you were off for Paris tonight?"

"A fortunate chance intervened," Immelan replied.

"Fortunate?"

Immelan watched Nigel's retreating figure with a menacing frown.

"I find it so," he replied. "Our wonderful prima donna is in great voice to-night—and I like to be prepared for all possible combinations."

EVEN more interesting episodes make the next of the three big installments into which we have divided this fine novel fascinating indeed. With it will appear a remarkable sea-story by Frederick R. Bechdolt, whom you will remember for "Lighthouse Tom" and "Sindbad of Oakland Creek," as well as many striking contributions by such writers as Clarence Herbert New, F. Morton Howard, Culpeper Zandt, Forbes Parkhill, Paul Annixter, Malcolm Mac Alpin and George L. Knapp.



Cutting Back

*A story of football and business by the author of
"Simple Minds" and "Diana of the Aphasians."*

By JONATHAN BROOKS

EDDIE HAYNES had no tact. Neither has a dynamo. There were other startling and faithful resemblances between the two. Eddie needed all his dynamic energy; for running a traction line (which was his business), is no snap. Well-nigh unerring persistence, another smooth trait of the dynamo, was required to carry him through his affair with Sims Levison.

Finally, a little more tact would have kept Eddie Haynes out of an awkward unpleasantness with Henry J. Dascher, President of the Walton Road Line—which made no difference—and prevented a heart-sore misunderstanding with Marjorie Dascher—which made all the difference in the world.

Now, managing a street-car or interurban system is harder work than shaving left-handed, and much more dangerous to personal well-being. It is no picnic, as Eddie Haynes can testify. Eddie had all the prerequisites for a successful traction magnate, but he had to call for ideas from the whole world, including a football camp

and Marjorie Dascher, before he was a winner. If he had not, in his younger days at Tippecanoe, been a whale of a half-back, he never could have made a success of the Walton Road Line. But that is getting ahead of the story.

"OLD Eddie Haynes, as I live!" exclaimed the president of the Hoosier Trust Company, rising from his chair.

"Big George" Ormsby greeted "Cutback" Eddie Haynes warmly, after the fashion of old boys, who, when young, fought, bled and almost died together on the football field. He upbraided Eddie for failing to keep in touch with him after their many exploits for Tippecanoe.

"When I was quarter-back, and you were left—no, when you were cutback," Big George laughed and slapped the arm of his chair. "We didn't have two half-backs when you were in the back-field, Eddie. Remember how they nicknamed you 'Cutback' instead of half-back?"

"No worse than 'Big' pinned on a runt of 139 pounds," Eddie grinned.

"And here we are, me running a trust company, and you a traction line. And Eddie," Big George Ormsby raised a finger, "I've been hearing about you. Some big men have been commenting on the way you worked the Walton Road Line out of the hole it was in. You keep on, and Tippecanoe will show the world a few, hey?"

"George, that's what I'm up here about," said Haynes. "I'm the kind of guy that always looks up his friends—when he needs 'em."

"What's the trouble?"

"George, I've mortgaged my past, present and future to make this Walton Road a success. When the war came on, I was made traffic superintendent. Then Levison, of the Central States Transportation Company, lifted our general manager, and they put me on that job. A little later, the line was thrown into receivership, and the Federal Judge appointed me as receiver. We worried along the best we could, and a few weeks ago the receivership was ended. Last night the directors met, and offered to make me vice-president and general manager. Henry J. Dascher, president of the line, has something against me, and the offer was made over his objection. He made the Board compromise with him by authorizing him to require me to take \$25,000 worth of stock at par, out of the treasury. The stock is worth about twenty-five cents, so I countered with an offer to invest \$25,000, buying the stock at the market price from all the directors. He snorted at that, but the directors gave him the laugh. This made him sore, and I learned this morning he has sworn to get even with me. He says I showed him up before his own Board. It will be bad enough to try to run the line with him on my neck all the time. But to make matters worse, I have not got \$25,000. I have some insurance, a little property and some savings, but am still shy \$10,000. I've got to raise the ten thousand or fall down on my agreement and lose what I think is my big chance. That is the whole situation in a nutshell.

"George, this thing has got to go," he declared firmly, concluding his plea. "Electricity is the permanent power for transportation. The people have to have the traction lines. Here is one that is not overcapitalized, but has been badly managed. I'm going to run it so it will pay dividends. I can do it."

"That's enough for me," commented Big George Ormsby.

"Can you help me?"

"There'll probably be about ninety legal and traditional obstacles, but I always was good at getting through a broken field," Ormsby laughed, "if I do say it myself."

"You needn't. I'll tell the world, and I know because I've tried to go with you. But I've no security—"

"Leave that to me, Eddie."

"George, this is certainly—"

"Oh, forget that stuff. I know you're grateful. If I didn't think you were, I'd not do it."

That ended the incident, for Big George Ormsby turned the talk to football and Tippecanoe. The ease with which some loans are made is only excelled by the difficulty with which others are put through.

EDDIE HAYNES, rejoicing, went to call on Marjorie at the informal hour of 10:45 A. M., to tell her the good news. She must have heard of the previous night's proposal by the Board of Directors, but she did not know his version of the story. Eddie, buoyant in spirit after his appointment and his successful trip to Big George Ormsby's office, lost what little tact he might have mustered in a pinch.

"Marjorie!" he exclaimed, as she opened the door for him. "Have you heard of our good luck?"

A boyish smile on his boyish face, his blue eyes twinkling, he advanced with open arms to claim her congratulations. She retreated from the doorway, with the result that he grasped only her hands. In his high spirits, he did not notice the expression of puzzled emotion on her pretty face.

"Girl of mine," he said, smiling still, "we won't have to wait much longer, will we? Have you heard all about it?"

"Eddie," she said, slowly, frowning slightly and shaking her head, "I'm all upset about the whole affair. I'm glad, of course, for you, but it's awfully hard, the way things are working out. I don't know what I shall do."

She looked at him an instant and then averted her eyes. He did not notice they were moist with tears.

"Why, Marjorie, dear," he began. "There's nothing to be upset about."

"Yes, there is," Marjorie replied. "Poor old dad is heart-broken."

"But Marjorie, he'll get over it. Dad's an old fo—" but he checked himself. "Dad's sort of old-fashioned, girlie."

She looked at him reproachfully, her lips quivering.

"Eddie, haven't you any consideration for him, whatever?"

It was only then that Cutback Eddie Haynes began to realize his position.

"Here, sit down, girlie, and let me explain," he said, soothingly. "What I intended to say was, that Dad forgets the traction business is not static. It does not land in a fixed, permanent basis and stay there. It changes from day to day and week to week. Business conditions, the growth of the community, electrical developments,—everything changes, and the traction business changes, all the time. The practices of twenty years ago are child's play, now. Dad simply has to remember this, and he refuses to do it."

"But, Eddie, you're so rough, so point-blank about it. Can't you give Dad any credit at all? Can't you remember he built this line, one of the first in the country, and nursed it along for years and years, through all the experimental stages, and through two panics, and everything? It's just as much his child as I am, Eddie, and he's just as jealous of it."

"By George, I never thought of that, Marjorie."

"If it fails, it will break his heart. Dad's an old man, Eddie, and his interest in this traction line is the only thing he has left in the world."

"Except you, Marjorie. But here I am, trying to take both of you away from him." He attempted a jocular spirit, but she would not be wheedled out of her mood.

"He told me this morning," she continued, wiping an eye with her handkerchief, "that yesterday the other directors laughed at him, actually laughed at him. I do not know what it was about, but I do know that at breakfast this morning he looked as if he had not slept. He looked as if he had been through the plague, or something. And that is not right, Eddie Haynes, after what he has been through for this company in the last twenty-five years."

Eddie shook his head, in mute sympathy. He did not know what to say. Before he could find any words, Marjorie's father, Henry J. Dascher, came into the room in his shirt sleeves.

"I'm sorry, Marjorie," he said, apologetically. "I heard you speaking, but I did not know you had company. I'll not interrupt." He turned to leave without speaking to Eddie or acknowledging his presence in any way. There was a bitter, set look on his face.

"Don't mind me," spoke up Eddie Haynes. "I just called to tell Marjorie about our meeting last night, and that I've arranged to meet the Board's proposition."

"That will be interesting, indeed,—to Marjorie," replied the old man, dryly. "But she has heard of the meeting last night."

With that he shuffled slowly out of the room, a haggard, sorrowful figure. Marjorie, her heart full of sympathy, watched him. When he disappeared in the hall she turned to Eddie and shook her head, sadly. A lump rose in Eddie's throat so that he could not speak. They sat silent in their chairs for a moment before Eddie rose abruptly and crossed the room to pat her on the shoulder.

"Listen, Marjorie, it will come out all right," he said, huskily. "I'm awfully crude, and I'm sorry I've hurt his feelings. But I'm going to save this property and make it pay. You tell him that for me, Marjorie. And maybe I'd better not stay any longer just now. I just seem to make things more difficult for you, every word I say and everything I do."

"It isn't your fault, Eddie. You can't help it," she replied, taking one of his hands in both her own. "I wish I could help you, and help Dad, too, but there doesn't seem to be any chance."

EDDIE HAYNES left the Dascher home and went back to his office, his head muddled by the problem of Marjorie and her father, when it should have been clear for the battle of the Walton Road Line. In another day, however, he managed to put the worry aside and attack the task of rehabilitating the traction system with all his old energy. Things happened.

The Walton Road Line appealed to the Public Service Commission for a twenty-per cent increase in rates, and the increase was granted. In a week gross receipts fell off amazingly because Walton Road passengers began to patronize the jitney busses. A whole flock of flivvers rushed along the highway beside the traction cars and attracted passengers, who thought they were being asked too much for a ride on

the line. The passengers did not worry over the flivvers. Every time a jitney busman had an accident and had to pay damages, or wore out a set of tires, he quit the business. But two other busmen seemed to spring up for every one that dropped out, and the supply of flivvers was inexhaustible.

Eddie saw Marjorie very rarely in the next six months.

"GENTLEMEN of the Board," said President Henry J. Dascher, at a called meeting of the directors, in late October, "something has got to be done. We have asked Mr. Haynes if he has any ideas, and he has none. He suggests that we appeal to the Public Service Commission to restore the old rate of fare, with the thought the people would rather ride with us than with the jitneys at the same rate. But that would merely reduce our losses, instead of making an earning."

"If we could get some one-man cars, and cut our labor bill—" began Eddie Haynes, in despair.

"If the line had either money or credit, we could think of some such thing," interposed President Dascher. "That is out of the question. Unless there is some method of reducing expenses very radically, we are in danger of going under with this company."

"I hope the directors will understand that every known expedient for the reduction of operating expenses is now in effect," said Eddie.

"The directors understand that you are doing your best," agreed Dascher, grimly. "But that seems to be not enough."

"Is there any chance to get rid of the property?" asked one of the directors.

"That is another matter I wished to bring up," replied Mr. Dascher. "Mr. Levison, controller of the Central States Transportation Company, approached me the other day with a suggestion that his company might take over the Walton Road Line. He knows our situation, and he hinted at a deal whereby his company should give us eight-per-cent bonds for our stock, rating the stock at twenty-five."

Mr. Dascher paused and looked about him to see how the other directors received the suggestion. Several faces registered welcome and relief, a few showed no emotion whatever, and none indicated absolute opposition to acceptance of such an offer. Eddie Haynes surveyed the group just as

Dascher did, and saw his investment and his opportunity slipping away from him. He appealed to the Board to give him a chance to start the stock in the direction of par, by endeavoring a little longer to produce some actual earnings. Mr. Dascher came out flatly in opposition, and a pitched battle resulted. Eddie held his ground stubbornly, insisting that no stockholder should agree to a plan that would write down his investment from a dollar to twenty-five cents, and then accept a promise of eight per cent a year on that amount. Mr. Dascher countered by showing the advantage of salvaging even twenty-five cents when further losses appeared, to him at least, highly probable.

"Let no one think," argued Mr. Dascher, coldly eying every man on the Board save Eddie Haynes, whose gaze he avoided, "that I am anxious to do this thing. The Walton Road Line means more to me, financially and sentimentally, than to any man in this room or elsewhere. I shall not go into that," and his jaws set in determination. "It is simply that I do not see any other way out."

But when the meeting broke up at midnight, Eddie had won a compromise in the form of a ten-day period in which he was to devote his energies solely to a survey of new business possibilities. At the end of that period, the directors were to meet again and determine whether, in view of his report, they desired to continue operation, or sell out to the Central States. Eddie was a heartsick young man when he went home that night, but in the morning he had his old fighting spirit back. Inspiration had blessed the dreams of a troubled night's sleep.

HE put in the day trudging along the Walton Road Line, stopping now and then to study a factory, a landscape or a trolley wire. He started out with his pipe, but by the time he reached the village of Walton and was ready to turn back, he was whistling, with the pipe in his pocket. His spirits had risen. In his old corduroys and high laced boots, he disregarded all convention and once more sought the Dascher home.

"I know I've been neglecting you, Marjorie," he apologized, as she greeted him, "but I've been working on a job that takes more than twenty-four hours a day. You'll forgive me when I tell you I've got the thing whipped, wont you?"

"I'll forgive you anyhow, Eddie," she replied, smiling. "But when are you going to tell me that?"

"This minute," he exclaimed, buoyantly. "Has your father said anything about our latest meeting?"

She shook her head.

"Well, they gave me ten days to produce a new program. If I can't convince them then that we should go on, they will accept a proposition made by Sims Levison, of the Central States, through your father, to take Central States bonds for our stock, rated at twenty-five cents on the dollar."

"Only one-fourth of par?" Marjorie asked, incredulously. "Why that's awful—it would simply ruin father, unless he is already ruined."

"I know it."

"What can you do, Eddie?"

"Well, here is what I have done: I put myself in Levison's place, and figured what I would do with the road if I, being Levison, had it. The rest is easy,—maybe. I've found out a headful. First place, the two light-and-heat company plants are on our line, and so is the water-company pumping station. They burn 600,000 tons of coal a year, all Indiana coal, shipped in over the Central States Transportation, and switched to the Belt railroad. If we were carrying that coal in from Walton, where we cross a steam road that runs up from the Knox and Greene county coal fields, we'd add about \$48,000 a year to our revenues, enough to make us a winner instead of a loser."

"Never heard of a traction company hauling coal," said Marjorie.

"No, and I'm afraid Dad would say it couldn't be done. But why shouldn't we, with the tracks and the motors available? Do it at night. But wait a minute. There's a little old electric line from Walton over to Strange, on the Central States. It is two miles long, and Frisby James, who owns it, runs one car each way a day, to hold his franchise rights. Pays taxes and hires about six men to keep the road barely alive in the hope he can sell it some day. It is worth nothing save as junk now. Right of way's overgrown with weeds, and there's no rolling stock."

"What has that to do with us?" asked Marjorie.

"Don't you see?"

"No, I don't."

Before Eddie could explain, Mr.

Dascher once more appeared, entering from the street door. He looked older and more harassed than Eddie had ever seen him. His face clouded as he came into the room and found his youthful vice-president talking to his daughter.

"GOOD-EVENING, Mr. Dascher," said Eddie, ignoring the expression on the elder man's face. "I was just telling Marjorie that I think I've found the way out of our troubles."

"Seems to me it would be more to the point if you used your energy convincing the Board of Directors," replied Mr. Dascher, dryly. "And while we're on the subject, I do not see what is to be gained by your conferences, as we'll call them, with Marjorie. For my own part, I should be deeply grateful if you would not call so often at our house—"

"Why, Daddy, that isn't kind. He's not been here for ever so long."

"Perhaps not. But I'm speaking only for myself," continued her father, irritably. "Mr. Haynes and I see enough of each other at the offices and in the Board meetings."

"Yes, especially at Board meetings," Eddie flared up, losing his temper.

"Yes, just that," repeated Mr. Dascher.

"I think you two men should be ashamed of yourselves," cried Marjorie, her eyes flashing. She looked from Eddie to her father, and from the latter back to Eddie again. Eddie regained control of himself.

"I am sorry, and ashamed," he said.

"Let me apologize, Mr. Dascher."

"It is your place, nothing more," declared the old man, glaring at him. Then, without further word, he turned and stalked out of the room.

"This is just about the end of everything, I suppose," Eddie told himself, half aloud.

"I'm afraid it is, for the time being, Eddie," agreed Marjorie. "I just can't have such things going on any longer. Father is almost a nervous wreck."

"But Marjorie, I can't lose you like this," he began, in protest.

"Losing implies possession first," she retorted, a faint, quizzical smile finding its way over her face.

"I quite understand that, girl. I use the word advisedly," Eddie insisted. "But if you are thinking of our old friend Levison—"

"If he were in your place, and you in his, he'd be too kind to be forever referring to your age," said Marjorie, tartly. "He is kind as can be, not only to me, but to father. He is lovely with father."

"Seems to me you're very much interested in defending him," declared Eddie.

"He needs no defense, but if he did, I'd be glad to take his part," Marjorie replied with some warmth.

NOW, Eddie Haynes not only lacked tact, as does a dynamo, but he knew no more of fencing than a dynamo knows. Furthermore, his love affairs were no more numerous than those of a simple, honest dynamo. It is not surprising, therefore, that he blurted out exactly what was in his mind.

"Why don't you marry him and be done with it?" he asked. "Then you could put in the rest of your life defending him."

"Well, maybe I shall, since you ask," Marjorie answered, coolly. "At any rate, he wants me to, and says he wants to buy the Walton Road Line, just to keep father from being ruined. I could have told you that a while ago, but you know so much you don't listen to anybody."

"Pooh," exclaimed Eddie Haynes. "If he's started doing things for anybody else's sake it breaks a world's record for him. He never did anything like that before."

"Eddie Haynes, I think you're horrid. And you'd better be going."

"Oh, I'm going, all right," he replied. "But believe me, I'm not going to stand by and see this Levison pull the wool over your eyes, or your father's either. He's making a sucker out of your father, and I'm going to find out why."

"I think you'd better go," she repeated. Her cheeks were burning and her breath came quickly. She was thoroughly angry.

"Goodby," he flung over his shoulder, as he turned and stamped to the door. He took his cap from a rack in the hall, and slammed the door behind him. Marjorie found some relief in tears.

Eddie sought comfort in walking. A mile tramp through the business district on the way home carried him past the doors of the Hoosier Trust Company. By chance, he bumped into Big George Ormsby, leaving the building.

"Eddie, how goes it?" asked Big George.

"Slowly."

"What's the trouble now?"

"Oh, nothing, except Levison, of the

Central States Transportation, is pulling the wool on Mr. Dascher. Has him sponsoring a proposal to take over the Walton Road in exchange for Central States bonds, four for one."

"Whew," and Big George Ormsby whistled. "What's he doing, bribing the old man?"

"Oh, no, not so raw as that. Although he would if he thought he could get away with it."

"Then don't put it past him."

"Have you heard anything, George?" asked Eddie, studying his old chum's manner.

"Nothing except a report in the trade that Dascher has bought a block of Central States stock." Ormsby watched Eddie Haynes to see how he would take the news.

"Why, he couldn't buy anything," declared Eddie.

"That's what I thought," replied Ormsby. "But stock may be transferred for many considerations. It may be transferred in exchange for money, or services, or almost anything that the original holder will accept. The original holder in this report was Levison."

"Good lord, George, Mr. Dascher wouldn't let Levison hand him a bribe!"

"I'm not saying so," Ormsby countered. "But I do say there is something going on. And if I were in your place, I'd watch my step."

Eddie told Ormsby of his hiking trip along the Walton Road Line during the day. He described the business that Levison could handle more profitably if the line were part of his own system and estimated the thousands of tons of coal that could be handled without using the Belt line.

"Eddie, you take this tip from me," Ormsby volunteered as he concluded. "I'm in a hurry to keep an engagement, but I'd say just this: If the Walton Road means that much to Levison, he has probably been scheming to acquire it for years. You just look back at the line's troubles of the last few years, and I'll bet you'll find a lot of them due to Levison."

"Well, he did lift our general manager, who was a bird," Eddie suggested. "But that wasn't a loss. Look at our present general manager!"

Ormsby smiled with him, but answered quickly:

"Yes, and I'd not be surprised if they

tried to kidnap you. One of their lawyers was in my office today trying to get a line on you. Think that over, Eddie."

As they parted, Ormsby repeated the suggestion that Eddie review the company's history in search of Levison influence. Eddie pondered the idea the rest of the way home, with the result that, shortly after dinner, bathed and dressed in business clothes, he chartered a taxicab and called at the homes of three former creditors of the Walton Road Line. The things that he learned made him fighting mad. The more he thought about it that night, the less he slept, and the less he slept the madder he got. He was still boiling over at ten o'clock the next morning, without having determined whether he could do anything about it, when the office boy ushered in Marjorie Dascher.

"EDDIE," she exclaimed, entering quickly, her cheeks aglow and her eyes sparkling with excitement. "Can I talk with you, right away?"

"Why, surely, Marjorie," he replied, rising from his seat and putting down the pipe he had sought as reinforcement against his problems. "You will close the door, wont you, Jimmy, and tell everybody I'm busy?"

"I started down here an hour ago to beg you not to make your fight against Mr. Levison and Dad, Eddie," she began, almost breathless, "But now that I'm here I want to apologize, and say that you were right, and ask to let me help all I can." She paused for breath.

"You couldn't apologize to me, girl, if you tried," Eddie smiled. "I'm awfully ashamed of myself for being such a brute yesterday afternoon."

"Oh, but you weren't. You were right all the time. I know. Listen; Daddy and I had a long talk last night, and he has his heart set on making this deal with Mr. Levison's company. He says if he can swing that deal, and see me safely married, meaning to Mr. Levison, he can rest in peace. They are the last two things he wants to do before he dies, he says. I could hardly stand it, Eddie. But I didn't tell him anything of what you found out. He's positive you can't work out a new program that will be worth while."

"That's where he is mistaken,—," Eddie began.

"Wait, wait, I want to talk. He didn't ask me to do anything, but I started down

here a while ago to ask you to drop your efforts and let him put through his deal. The cars were held up, so I took a jitney bus. It was the first time I ever rode in one of them, because the line runs near our house and Dad always keeps me supplied with transportation. I've always walked the two blocks from the line over to the office, here, when I have taken the car. Today I asked the jitney man to drive around past this building. He said he couldn't.

"Why not?" I asked.

"My contract says I've got to run along this car line."

"That sounded queer to me, so I asked him what contract that could be.

"Why, my contract with the company that sells me oil, gas and supplies," he said. "The Central States Transportation Company. They sell to me at half-price, the same as a lot of other jitneys, and we agree to run along this line here."

Her eyes blazed with anger as she told her story. Eddie clenched and unclenched his fists.

"I've found out some things that match up with your discovery," he said, slowly, not trusting his tongue or his temper. "George Ormsby told me yesterday that it is reported Levison has transferred a block of Central States stock to your father. The report is that it was a sale, but nobody in the financial district believes that, because your father is said to be unable to make any big investments."

"Eddie, that would be a bribe, a plain bribe!" Marjorie exclaimed. "Oh, we *must* stop this thing, somehow."

"And that is not all," Eddie continued. "Last night, three old creditors of the Walton Road line told me that, during the war, Levison urged them to sign a petition for receivership for the line. His idea was to buy up the road from the receiver, dirt cheap."

"But he didn't know the receiver, did he?"

"No, and he doesn't know me now, either," Eddie Haynes declared. "Marjorie, this man may have been a friend, or more, of yours, but before he's through he's going to take just about every kind of licking a man can take from another. And he's going to take them from me."

Closing a hard fist, he banged it on his desk. Marjorie shuddered, but inwardly rejoiced for her champion.

"This thing is going to be pulled out of

the fire if it is the last thing I ever do. Although," and he relaxed, to smile a boyish smile, "I'm darned if I know just yet, how I am going to do it."

"Eddie, it must be done," she breathed. "But how? And how can I help?"

They talked long and in detail. Finally, they sought counsel of Big George Ormsby, over a luncheon table. They told Big George the whole story from beginning to end, and he knit his brows over the problem. His advice was typical Ormsby advice.

"Let Miss Dascher keep up her show of ignorance of the affair," counselled Big George. "Let her seem to fall in with plans," and he hastened to reassure her that he realized the position she was in. "No matter how distasteful her assignment may become."

"As for you, Eddie, the best thing you can do is to get out of town. Lay low somewhere until the last minute. Work out your plans where they can not become known."

"George, I'm cussed if I'm going to lay down, just to suit them. I'm going to stay here and fight this thing out."

"That would be fine, Eddie. But they'll know every step you take. You can not make a move without their knowledge. They've got you surrounded with lawyers and dummies. Make your plans, but keep in the dark, and plump your stuff at them in the directors' meeting."

"Maybe you are right," Haynes conceded. "But Lord, George, I'm certainly going to give those fellows a battle."

"That's the idea, of course. But there are different ways of making the fight. Its just like football. You can play your game in the newspapers before Saturday, or you can save it until the referee blows his whistle on the field. And by jingo, that gives me an idea!" Ormsby banged his fist on the desk. "Why don't you run up to Tippecanoe for a few days and give the boys a lift for the Illinois game? They need some help, believe me! Asked me to come over, and I'm going, in a couple of days. Boy, it will be fun to get back for a while and mix with the pigskins and goose grease again." He looked at Eddie with a mild, reminiscent smile, thinking for the moment of old days on the campus and gridiron.

"Great Scott, George, do you think I'm crazy?" Eddie Haynes had difficulty holding his temper. "Here I am in the biggest

fight I ever had, and you advise me to run back to college to help coach the football team!"

"Well, suit yourself. If you can think of any place where you'd be less under suspicion by the Levison crowd, all right."

Marjorie chimed in to back up Big George's suggestion.

Eddie Haynes could not bring himself, immediately, to see the wisdom of Ormsby's suggestion. It savored too much of running away from the battleground to appeal to him. But he finally gave in and agreed to leave town for Tippecanoe. It struck him as silly business, but he waived his own judgment to accept the joint opinion of Ormsby and Marjorie.

YOU have heard of the old graduate who came all the way home from Hawaii to Harvard to help the team get ready for the Yale game, and of the Yale men from Alaska and Central America hurrying back to New Haven for the final work of prepping their eleven.

You have not heard of the old boys who, though close at hand, have lost touch with the Varsity. They do not celebrate their return. Rather, they reënter the precincts of youth furtively, ashamed that they have not held up their love and open support of the university. Eddie Haynes realized he was a stranger on the old campus when, after midnight, he crossed the river and was halfway to West Tippecanoe. Walking along, whistling and swinging his suitcase, he stopped short to think of a place where he might spend the night.

"I hadn't thought of that," he said, half aloud. There was no hotel in West Tippecanoe and he could hardly, at this hour of the night, seek the fraternity house in which he had spent four happy years. The boys would all be abed, he told himself, besides he knew none of them now by name or by sight. Reproaching himself, as one who has neglected a friend of his youth, Eddie Haynes turned around, and sought a hotel in town. At breakfast the next morning he bumped into an old friend, now an assistant professor, who welcomed him with open arms.

"Do you know the coach?" he asked. "We need your help for this Illinois game. Come on with me and I'll introduce you. He'll be glad to see you when I tell him who you are."

"Who I was, you should say," Eddie

answered. "I thought when I left here that I had sweat and bled enough on old Steward Field to make my name a byword for twenty years."

"It has been ten, already," said his friend. "But oldtimers like me certainly won't forget Cutback Eddie Haynes for forty years. Man, how you could fight past the tackles for your gains!"

There is no use going into details over the joyful reunions Eddie Haynes held on the campus. The coach, one Jack Anderson, an eastern man, welcomed him as an addition to the emergency coaching staff.

"So they called you 'Cutback' instead of 'half-back,' eh?" he asked.

"This is the man, this Haynes, who invented, patented and demonstrated the cutback crossback," an alumnus explained, hastily. "He gained more ground on that play than the rest of his team could get on end runs and forward passes combined."

"Crawley, of Chicago, was one of the great men on that trick," another said.

"I know the play," Anderson rejoined. "I saw Barrett working it the day his team beat Harvard. A great play. We're glad to have you, Mr. Haynes. I'll ask the trainer to give you a suit."

THE next day, one week before Tippecanoe should meet the Illini, Coach Anderson asked Haynes to line up at half-back and show the regular backs his old specialty. Eddie went into the line-up with all his old zest and carried the ball repeatedly, first in signal practice and then in scrimmage.

"Great stuff!" exclaimed Coach Anderson, as he called a halt on proceedings. "I like that play. Can you give it to the boys, Haynes?"

"I can if I have enough wind left," panted Eddie.

"Come here, fellows," Anderson called the entire squad around him. "We are going to try out the old cutback crossback, which Mr. Haynes has been showing us. I want every man on this team to know all there is to know about the play. Will you tell us about it, Mr. Haynes, please?"

"All right," said Eddie. "Suppose I'm playing left half-back. The quarter calls on me for an end run, around right end. He shoots me the ball, and then he falls into the interference with the full and the other half-back. I jump in behind them. The other team sees us swinging to the right. What happens? Their secondary

defense goes out wide to meet us, and reinforce the end, out there by himself. As they swing over, my interference drives into them. If I follow, I pile into a scrimmage. If I run wide to the right, I may get around or I may be run out of bounds. See? Everybody on the other team, by this time, is headed for the sidelines to cut me off. Therefore I cut back toward the left, and I usually find a clear field.

"Here's the point: Follow the interference far enough to make them expect a run to the right, and then, when they move, shoot in to the left, leaving the interference to go ahead and keep up the bluff. Is that clear?"

"I'd like to try that," spoke up one of the halves, a slender, lightly built boy.

"Wait a minute," interrupted the Coach. "As you played it, Mr. Haynes, was there any difference between the formation and the regular formation for an end run?"

"None whatever."

"Good, we'll try it. Here, Williams," addressing the half-back who wished to try the play, "Get in there at left half, and we'll see what we can do with the cutback."

There followed a half hour's strenuous workout, and then a session of scrimmage with the Freshman eleven, all the varsity half-backs trying their mettle with the old Haynes play. All of them worked it successfully until the Freshmen learned nothing else was being used, and set themselves to stop it.

"Now then," said Eddie to Coach Anderson, "The next thing is to make sure the boys will vary the attack. This play is effective only when it is mixed up with the regular end run."

"Sure thing," the Coach agreed. He instructed the backs to mix up the cutback with the honest end runs and off tackle plays. The first year men could not tell which direction the man with the ball would take, and the result was he gained consistently against them.

"Enough," called Coach Anderson. Then, turning to Haynes, he added, "We will depend on this play against Illinois, Mr. Haynes. The Illini scouts have seen about everything we have in the way of forward passing, and they have our usual running and kicking game sized up. We can keep this covered until time for the game, and if I am not mistaken, we'll run them ragged with it. Will you be able to stay here and help us polish it up a bit?"

"I think so."

"Great stuff!" exclaimed the Coach. "We'll give those Illini a run yet, even if they are from the 'Land of Full Grown Men,' as their name says."

THERE were the usual preliminaries to the big game with Illinois. Other old grads came back to help round out the play of individual members of the eleven. Among them was Big George Ormsby, who joined Eddie in polishing up the cutback. His part consisted of showing the quarterback the best place for him in the interference, and demonstrating how he could best feed the ball and then protect the runner until time for him to cut back into the open field from behind the interference. Eddie drilled the half-backs until they were dizzy, on starting, on huddling in behind the interference until the right moment, and on darting out from behind it in the opposite direction at the proper instant.

Until the Friday night before the game, Eddie Haynes was so completely immersed in football and football spirit that he had virtually forgot his traction troubles. Every man he met was talking and dreaming football. The campus breathed hope and determination for the annual struggle with Illinois. At his old fraternity house, where he was now staying, the boys were playing and replaying the game, a dozen times a day. The only thing that tended to recall his problem with the Walton Road line was the presence of Big George Ormsby in the football camp. But Ormsby had borrowed a cap from one boy and a jersey from another, and looked so much like the Big George of a decade gone, that Haynes sometimes wondered whether he had ever been connected with the Hoosier Trust Company. Only once was the question of business mentioned between them.

"When's your directors' meeting?" asked Ormsby, Friday evening.

"Tomorrow night," Haynes replied.

"We'll have to get together right after the game," Ormsby said. "We'll talk things over on the way to Indianapolis."

Both of them made fiery speeches at the Illini bonfire on the campus that night. Coach Anderson whipped the crowd to a winning frenzy, in an appeal for a loyal, fighting spirit on the morrow.

"We are going in to this game with one idea," he shouted. "That is, to win. For ten years, now, we've fought to make a good showing. Tomorrow, we fight to win.

And we *shall* win. Here is the good omen. The last Tips to win from Illinois were the Tips on Ormsby's and Haynes's eleven. They won for us, and we'll win for them. They've given us everything they have, just as they did ten years ago, on the field. For them, and for Tippecanoe, we must, we *shall* win."

The bonfire died out when the crowd carried Eddie and Big George around the campus on their shoulders. They were thousands of miles from all banking and traction problems.

ILLINOIS sent over not merely the football squad, but the great Illini band to lead two trainloads of rooters in the old "Loyalty" song. The air was so charged with keen, sportsmanlike rivalry that a perfect stranger to both Universities, one unfamiliar with the ways of cleats and pigskins, would have experienced a decided thrill. Students were on edge, and old grads were nervous wrecks when the referee called the rival captains to the center of the field.

"George," said Eddie Haynes, as they sat on the players' bench, a privilege accorded only old "T" men, "this thing is too strenuous. I can't stand it much longer."

"We win the toss," Big George Ormsby replied, too intent on proceedings to hear Eddie's remark.

The game was on with a bang. Illinois kicked off, and swarmed down the field to prevent a long return of the ball. Tippecanoe was down at the twenty-yard line. The quarterback remembered Coach Anderson's advice.

"If we play safety football, and it comes down to a question of three or six points, Illinois can beat us. We must play a wide open, scoring game," Anderson had said. "Cut loose every time you get the ball."

Instead of punting out of danger, therefore, the quarter called an end run, with Williams carrying the ball. He gained five yards around right end. The next play saw him with the pigskin again, but this time it was the old Haynes cutback. Williams shot out toward right end again behind perfect interference, and the Illini secondary defense rushed over to intercept him. Just outside tackle, however, Williams swung sharply back to the left, deserting his interference and shooting in at an angle of ninety degrees. He cut through an open field and sprinted to the

fifty-yard line before he was brought down by the Illini defensive full-back. Tippecanoe stands went crazy, and the president of the Hoosier Trust Company threw a new derby hat halfway across the gridiron. An Illinois guard fell on it, thinking the ball was loose.

The scene was nothing to the riot that broke two minutes later when, after alternating the end run and the cutback, Williams again broke through on the sharp cutback crossback, and shot over the Illini goal line. It was a touchdown. Every hat on the Tippecanoe stands was in the air, every mouth open wide, and every pair of lungs shouting. Big George Ormsby, banker and ex-quarter-back, danced a snake dance in front of the Tippecanoe bench, and pounded Eddie Haynes on the head and shoulders. Eddie sat huddled on the bench, wrapped in thought.

"You old mossback," his banking friend yelled, "loosen up!"

THE goal was kicked amid great excitement; the score was posted at 7 to 0. Illinois again kicked off, somewhat dazed. The Illini were not in the habit of being scored on in such jig time. They swarmed down the field again in a frenzy, determined to fling the Tippecanoe men back of their own goal lines. But once more the Tippecanoe quarter cut loose with the running attack instead of kicking and playing safe to hold the lead. Tippecanoe marched steadily down the field, first down after first down. Williams and the other half-back took turns carrying the ball outside tackle, now cutting back, now running wide. They fairly ran the Illinois secondary defense ragged.

At midfield, Williams gained fifteen yards around right end behind closely knit interference. On the next play, with the interference shielding him like a blanket, he shot out toward the end again, and then, with the Illinois defense drawn over, he cut back into an open field toward the left.

"George, oh, George," exclaimed Eddie Haynes, clutching his friend's arm. "I've got it, I've got it!"

"Got what? The bug, at last? I knew you'd warm up to this game," Big George Ormsby replied. "Look, look, LOOK!" His attention held to the field.

"No, wait a minute," explained Eddie, grasping his shoulder and shaking him. "I've got the idea that will win this traction fight of mine."

Big George Ormsby looked at him for a moment, in deep scorn.

"Oh, so *that* is where your mind is, at this crucial moment, eh?"

"Come on, George, I want you to help me," Eddie declared. He rose, took a firm grip on Ormsby's arm, and fairly dragged him off the field.

"I'm going to work the old cutback on Levison's Central States outfit," he explained. Big George Ormsby, watching the game over his shoulder as he reluctantly followed his friend, wondered if the excitement had proved too much for Haynes.

"The old boys can't stand the gaff," yelled a wild-eyed cheer leader to the crowd. "Nerves all shot. Nine rahs for Haynes and Ormsby!"

As they gave the cheers, and Eddie and Big George pushed their way out through the side-lines crowd, Williams went over for the second Tippecanoe touch-down. Big George stopped stock still and begged Eddie to make his business wait until the game could be finished.

"We'll be back before its over," and Eddie dragged him along. They proceeded without waiting to see whether the second goal was kicked. "Listen," Eddie explained, "I'm going to work the cutback idea in this traction mess. Everything I've got is tied up in the Walton Road line. If we're sold out over my head, I'm simply ruined. Levison thinks, and so does Dascher, that they've got us."

"We should score again before this game's over," remarked Big George.

"Forget that a minute," exclaimed Eddie, sharply. "I'm going to do some long distance telephoning, and I want you to put in a call for me, too. I'm going to call our attorney, and tell him to get affidavits from the creditors who told me Levison's counsel advised them to join in bankruptcy proceedings against us, during the war. I'm going to call my office and assign a man to hunt up that taxi driver and bully an affidavit out of him saying the Central States Auto Supply Company, sells him stuff at half price for use along our lines. They will both tell Dascher, and Dascher will tell Levison. He will also get hold of his friends among the directors. All that, George, constitutes my interference. See?"

"Great, *great!*" exclaimed Big George Ormsby, now intent on his friend's words. "But then what?"

"When they get all lined up for those

things, then I'll cut back in the direction I want to go," explained Eddie. "That's why I need you, George. I want you to call up Frisby James, of the line that connects our road with the Central States. I've got a hunch about that, George."

THEY entered the Tippecanoe Union building together. Fifteen minutes afterward Big George Ormsby came out on the run, bareheaded, and hurried back to the football field and his place on the bench. He saw Tippecanoe on the defensive, now, because Illinois had finally solved the cutback problem, had stopped the Tippecanoe backs, and was flinging a furious attack at the Tippecanoe tackles and ends. It was a typical tearing, flaring Illini offensive, the backs ripping their way through for vicious gains. At the twenty-yard line, Tippecanoe held resolutely, but the Illini answered with one of the drop-kicks for which they are famous. Five minutes later, the performance was repeated. This was in the middle of the third period. Early in the fourth quarter the Illini again rushed down the field at a breakneck pace, once more to be halted within scoring distance. The third time, an Illini back-booted a drop-kick between the goal posts, and the score stood 14 to 9.

When Eddie Haynes returned to the field, a confident smile on his face, Illinois was again on the march, this time determined to score the touch-down that would win the game. The Tippecanoe stands had settled back, silent before the seemingly irresistible drive. They saw the boys struggling doggedly against impending defeat that appeared to be spreading through the ranks on the field. Eddie Haynes said nothing, but sized up the situation as he approached the bench. He looked at the cheer leader, and then from him appealingly to the great Tippecanoe crowd.

"Are we whipped?" he called.

The cheer leader sprang to his feet, pointed to Eddie Haynes as an omen of victory, and demanded a rousing support for the team.

"Here's our good omen," he yelled. "He's come back. So have we."

The cheer that arose caused every Tippecanoe man on the eleven to raise his head and take new heart. From defending themselves stubbornly, they suddenly shifted to a fighting, driving defense that bordered on attack. Surprised, the Illini hesitated. Tippecanoe flung herself anew

into the battle and, as the whistle blew a little later, was herself on the march with Illinois hunched in defense. The crowd carried Eddie Haynes through the campus on its shoulders.

They drove back to Indianapolis in Big George Ormsby's car as soon as Eddie could get away from the celebrating throngs.

THERE was a full meeting of the Board of Directors that night in the little offices of the Walton Road Line. Eddie Haynes appeared just a few minutes before President Dascher called the group to order. Nothing in his expression hinted at his discovery of the game that had been played by Levison of the Central States, and Dascher. The directors might have noticed a slight tightening of his jaws if, through any inkling of his plans, they had guessed at the fight that was brewing. To the casual observer Eddie looked more like a boy fresh from a rubdown and shower, than a harassed business man with his back to the wall.

"Gentlemen, we might as well come to order," said President Dascher, sharp at eight o'clock. "Mr. Haynes, our vice-president and general manager, is now with us, and it is the hour stipulated by the by-laws. We meet to entertain any suggestions Mr. Haynes may have as to ways and means of keeping the road alive and earning dividends."

He paused and looked about him to make sure he stated the case fairly. The directors, lighting cigars and settling back in their chairs, nodded assent.

"But before we go into that," Dascher continued, suavely, "there is another matter I should like to lay before the Board. It will take only a few moments. Rumors have been circulating, involving us and the Central States, that have absolutely no foundation in fact. They reflect no credit on us, and they do a scandalous injustice to the Central States. To clear this matter up I wish to introduce Mr. Levison, of the Central States."

Eddie Haynes, sitting at Dascher's right, was somewhat surprised by this move, but made no sign. With the other Directors, he urged the President to bring in Mr. Levison.

"That is certainly kind of you," Dascher assured the Board. "Mr. Levison is in one of the outer offices, and I shall just ask him to step in." He went to a door at the side

of the room, opened it, and bowed in Mr. Levison, of the Central States, a tall, distinguished looking man whose only fault seemed to be too much polish. The Directors of the Walton Road Line yielded to the dramatic manner in which Dascher dominated the meeting. Overawed by the presence of the great magnate, they rose and filed past him, shaking hands as Dascher presented them. Eddie Haynes, smiling inwardly, swung in at the tail end of the procession. He shook hands and resumed his seat. Dascher suggested that the Board would be glad to hear from Mr. Levison.

"It is certainly a pleasure to meet here with you gentlemen," Levison began, standing at Dascher's left. "It is a compliment to me, to be with you a few moments. I am glad to be here, although sorry for the occasion. There have been rumors of late, concerning our two roads. I have heard stories that our road urged some of your creditors to join in bankruptcy proceedings against you. Indeed, it is reported that you gentlemen are planning to sue my company for conspiracy and malicious destruction of property.

"Now," and he paused, looking about him with a deprecatory air, "I am ashamed to dignify such rumors with denial, but I could not resist the impulse to come here before you gentlemen. I want to tell you how sorry I am such scandalous, untrue stories are circulating. They are false. Our road has only the best of feeling for yours, gentlemen. On top of these rumors is another just as ridiculous. It is being whispered about that our road is fostering jitney competition with your line, by selling the jitneys supplies at half price. That is nonsense.

"Both of these stories are founded on the theory that there must be some enmity between us. As a matter of fact, we can only be the best of friends. In conclusion, I wish to assure you once more that we have only the best of feeling for your company. I think, Mr. Chairman, that is all I wish to say."

"Mr. Levison," said Dascher, rising to close the incident without discussion by the Board, "I am sure the Board appreciates your feeling in this matter. I am also confident that nobody on this Board knows of such rumors, or has ever suspected your company of conducting itself in any but the most honorable manner to-

ward us. If I speak the sense of the Board, as I think I do," he paused to look about the table, "I may say that we will drop the subject, here and now. Although if we may apprehend the party that started such rumors, we might join in giving him a coat of tar and feathers."

He joined Mr. Levison in a smile, as several of the men about the table laughed and clapped their hands. Eddie Haynes grinned to himself at the neatness with which Dascher and Levison had disarmed the Board. Then, deeming the time ripe for his own play, he addressed the Chairman.

"MR. CHAIRMAN, there are some things I should like to say."

The meeting quieted down. Levison looked at Dascher, questioningly, as if to ask whether he should remain.

"I think Mr. Levison may be glad to know what we are doing," said Eddie, rightly interpreting the glances between the Central Transportation head and Mr. Dascher. "I would like to have the Board invite him to remain. This matter has some bearing on the Central Transportation offer to take over our road in exchange for bonds."

"That is very kind," said Levison, also curious to know what was coming.

"I shall be brief," Eddie declared. "You gentlemen seemed inclined to accept the Central's offer. Since our last meeting I have not been very busy on a new program for the road. Indeed, I have been back at Tippecanoe, coaching the football eleven. But as to these rumors, I know something about them.

"Ten days ago a large creditor of this road told me a Central attorney had urged him to join in bankruptcy proceedings, during the war." Levison started, uneasily, but Eddie Haynes continued steadily without raising his voice. "Ten days ago, too, a jitney busman told a friend of mine, one who is vitally concerned with the fortunes of this road, that he bought gasoline, tires and so on, from a small company, owned, he said, by Mr. Levison. He said he got supplies at half-price under an agreement by which he was to run his flivver along our line. I know these two things to be true, but I cannot imagine how such rumors as those mentioned by Mr. Levison started."

"Why in the world should we—" began Levison, sitting up straight in his chair.

He looked at Dascher and Dascher looked at him, as Haynes kept on talking.

"I would rather not be interrupted, if the Board will hear me out," said Eddie. "This afternoon I telephoned our attorney to see this old creditor and obtain testimony with a view to suing the Central for conspiracy and malicious destruction of property. I telephoned an assistant in my own office to obtain an affidavit from the jitney driver. The rumors must have started since my telephone calls. Rumors travel fast, however, and I am not surprised that they reached Mr. Levison so quickly. Nor am I surprised that Mr. Dascher knows of them, and is so much concerned. Indeed, I desired that Mr. Levison, at least, should know of the things I had learned, and rather apprehended he would be concerned with them for a few hours. This gave me an opportunity to do something for our road in other directions."

HE paused to note the effect his words were having on the Board. The directors were sitting up in their chairs.

"I am sure this is rather an unheard-of proceeding," declared President Dascher. "You should produce your proof."

"It is ridiculous," began Levison, interrupting. "Who are your witnesses?"

"There are several things unheard of, up to this minute, that the directors should by all means hear, Mr. Chairman," said Eddie, firmly. "I was permitted to stake my fortune entirely, on the success of this road. I propose to do my best toward safeguarding my investment, and to protect the property of other stockholders. I shall proceed, unless the Board absolutely overrules me. My witness on the jitneys will appear if I telephone to her."

"Her presence at this meeting might prove embarrassing in several ways. I did not ask her to come, for I had no means of knowing that persons outside the Board would be present."

"Well," suggested Mr. Dascher, sarcastically, "suppose you give us her name."

"Yes, tell us who she is," Levison urged, sitting forward in his chair and drumming impatiently with his fingers on the table.

"If this thing were to be dragged out for days, I should not do it," said Eddie, looking steadily at Levison, "because smart lawyers might be sent to browbeat and bully her. But since I propose to settle

this matter here and now, I do not mind saying my witness is Miss Marjorie Dascher."

Mr. Dascher gasped and turned pale, while Levison started uneasily, before slumping back in his chair. Neither could say a word. It was as if a bombshell had dropped in the meeting.

"Here is the story I have to tell the Board. The Central States hauls 600,000 tons of coal annually to the two light and heat companies, and the water company, which are on our line. The Central States has to switch all this coal to the Belt railroad and thereby loses a part of the freight. This loss to the Belt would pay for our little road, at the terms offered us, in two or three years. If we sell to Central, they'll switch the coal over our line. Now then, I firmly believe the Central States Company," and he eyed Levison, grimly, "has been working for years to ruin our company, in order to buy it in for a song."

"Mr. Haynes, this is surely no time to argue such matters. We owe it to Mr. Levison as a matter of courtesy—"

But Eddie Haynes refused to be interrupted by Mr. Dascher.

"We owe it to Mr. Levison as a matter of justice to ourselves," he exclaimed, "to advise him that we know his tactics, and are prepared to defend ourselves."

"Mr. Chairman," said Levison, half rising, "I did not come here to be insulted, and I had better not remain, without legal counsel,—"

"Unless Mr. Haynes can show that Mr. Levison may remain to his own interest, as well as the interest of our company"—began Dascher. He was thoroughly angry and embarrassed.

"It is decidedly to his interest, as well as to our own," declared Eddie. "Gentlemen of the Board, hear me out. This is my program for continuing operation of the Walton Road line. We will haul this 600,000 tons of coal to the utility companies ourselves, delivering it at night when our line is idle. We will realize approximately \$60,000 revenue. I have promises of the business because we can carry coal more cheaply, under the law, than the steam roads. It means a savings to the utilities."

"But that is impossible," spoke up Levison. "We do not touch your line at any point. Where can we deliver the coal to you?"

"I thought you had overlooked that point. Indeed, thanks to the trip I made

to Tippecanoe for the football game, you did overlook it. While you were busy stewing over these fancied rumors, and defending yourselves indignantly, I made it a point to obtain an option on the little old Frisby James line connecting us with you at Walton. My interest in football gave me the idea."

Levison wilted. Dascher started, and looked at the Central States chief with ill concealed dismay. He found no inspiration in Levison's attitude.

"A prominent banker obtained that option for me, Gentlemen of the Board," said Eddie, turning to the directors. "I stand ready to indorse it to the company. This banker is behind me, and my program. Mr. Levison's line can deliver that 600,000 tons of coal a year to us in Mr. Levison's own cars, instead of to the Belt railroad, and we can add about \$60,000 a year to our revenues. That one piece of business alone should make us a winner."

"But that is impossible," Levison exclaimed, starting from his seat again. He cursed himself inwardly for neglecting to sew up the little Frisby James line.

"No more impossible than for me to hold my option on the connecting line if you succeed in grabbing the Walton Road Line," retorted Eddie. "In which case the Walton Road would be worth about a nickel to you."

Levison settled back in his chair again, and looked at Dascher as if beseeching him to do something. Dascher made a feeble effort.

"Gentlemen of the Board, this program needs discussion before we vote on it. We have also to consider the generous offer of the Central States—"

"If the Board will permit me," Eddie Haynes interposed, "I would make this suggestion. Let us dispose of the Central States offer, with the understanding that none of our directors holding Central States stock," and he glanced at Dascher, "shall vote on the question."

"I was about to suggest," said President Dascher, flushing, "that inasmuch as I asked Mr. Levison to attend the meeting as my guest, he and I might retire for a few minutes. The Board will wish some privacy in this matter, and Mr. Levison must feel some embarrassment in the situation."

"In that case," Eddie agreed, "the vice-president presides."

It took the Board five minutes to adopt

Eddie Haynes' program for a revived Walton Road Line. All the fight had gone out of Dascher's system when he and Levison were ushered back into the room and apprised of developments. Levison, however, had one spark left.

"Suppose we refused to deliver coal to your line?" he asked, with an effort at sarcasm.

"In that case," Eddie replied, "we will ask the utilities to route it over another steam road that crosses our line at Walton. And they'll do it because the rate is exactly the same. And you'd lose all the business instead of only a part."

Levison gave up, and affected a smile.

"You win," he said. "But say, Mr. Haynes, if you got this line of attack from football, what do you call it?"

"The cutback," Eddie replied. "Feint in one direction, and cut back in another."

"The most unkindest cutback of all," commented Levison, with a wry grin. "Football must be a great game. How do you play it?"

"For all you're worth," said Eddie.

EDDIE had been at the Dascher home some little time before Mr. Dascher himself reached there. He was as much embarrassed as Eddie and Marjorie were.

"I—I—just wanted to say I appreciate your being so easy on the old man at the meeting, Eddie," he said, uncomfortably. "You could have been a whole lot rougher, and still have been only fair. You ought to have been rougher with Levison. I was, myself, after the meeting adjourned. I made him take back his Central stock and canceled the conditional transfer."

The head of the Walton Road Board looked suddenly older and more haggard, even while he registered relief from a painful situation.

"Oh, that's all right," said Eddie.

"The trouble with me," continued Mr. Dascher, wearily, but with a slight twinkle under his eyebrows, "is that I'm an old man. And the traction business is like football, as you say; 'it is a young man's game.'"

He smiled as Eddie laughed heartily. Their hands and their eyes met in frank good fellowship. Then Marjorie spoke for the first time.

"If you've any congratulations, or anything like that, Dad," she said, "prepare to deliver them now."



Deep Water Men

The Rajah of Mong Klang

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

LEAVING the steamer at anchor in the open Roads, one enters Sourabaya in a launch which runs up what appears to be a very wide canal. After passing the Fort, this canal becomes a busy port with stone quays and warehouses along each side and, at the Custom House, the traveler changes from launch to a four-wheeled *kosong*. Still following the canal due south, its upper banks indicate that it is really one outlet of a river—the Kali Sourabaya. At either side, are the narrow congested streets of the old city—but if one keeps going, three or four miles from the canal entrance, he eventually strikes the better residence district with its well-shaded streets and somewhat cooler air. At the left, Simpang Road branches off at Government House, beyond which are the Hotel Simpang and the big hospital, with their rear balconies overlooking a wider reach of the river. Presumably, the traveler is satisfied to call it a day by this time and secure a room

at the hotel. But our business, for the moment, is with the hospital—now that you know exactly where it is.

Two weeks earlier, a badly wounded man had been taken ashore on a stretcher from a "B. P." liner and conveyed with as little jolting as possible to one of the best private rooms in the hospital. Accompanying him were the ship's doctor and a Miss Armitage who had barely saved the man from being killed outright in a midnight attack upon him by unknown Burmese from the second-class. And though the patient had ample funds at his bankers', the girl had left an additional sum of her own to insure the best of treatment for him.

In the hospital office, the patient's name and occupation had been duly entered as Raymond Jardine — archæologist — recently from Burma and Singapore—address in Asiatic waters, care of the Hongkong & Shanghai Banking Corporation. But this was merely the official record—

seldom looked at or referred to. Throughout the institution, he was vaguely known as "the man in Number 58, with two stab-wounds in his side," and the official undertakers had been given to understand that his death was only a matter of a few hours' waiting.

NOW, all physicians will admit, if they are honest practitioners, that they are occasionally—even frequently—mistaken in diagnosis. It is almost impossible that they should not be. A physician reasons from known facts or symptoms as described by the patient, his friends, or some other doctor—and such examination as it is possible for him to make at the time. Therefore, Doctors Van Wiart and Glendenning accepted as a basis for their diagnosis the statement of their friend, Dr. Symonds, that Mr. Jardine had been convalescing from a severe attack of jungle fever, while on the steamer, and was in a very much weakened condition when he had been stabbed. Taking this and the amount of blood he had lost into consideration, the two hospital physicians could see no chance for his recovery—though their examination showed that no vital organ had been punctured—and told Symonds that, in the circumstances, the man couldn't last more than six or eight hours, probably. There had been little or no mention of Jardine's name among the doctors or nurses—no reference whatever to his personal history or affairs. He was, for the time, simply "the patient."

The fact was, however, that Jardine had been much nearer full recovery from the fever than he permitted anyone on the steamer to know. For this, he had his reasons. For nearly a year, he had been unearthing a long-forgotten temple in one of the mountain provinces of Burma, during which time he had saved the old Rajah's life and won his liking to such an extent that the prince not only executed a legal document making the archæologist heir to the *musnud* but presented him with a number of magnificent jewels besides. When the Rajah was poisoned by a harem woman who was intriguing in behalf of her son, Jardine, rotten with fever, succeeded in getting out of Mong Klang with the document making him the succeeding Rajah and a number of wonderful jewels, embedded in cement-castings from some of the minute temple bas-reliefs. After learning of Miss Armitage's plucky at-

tempt to save him when he was stabbed by some of the Burmese who were on his trail, he left a tentative will in which she was given two of the larger cement-castings, the others, with his personal effects, being placed in the hands of his bankers at Sourabaya.

Jardine knew that he was in a very serious condition when he reached the Simpang Hospital—but was more or less confident, even then, that he would eventually pull through. For the same reason that he had appeared weaker than he really was on the steamer, however, he didn't let the doctors see that he had much hope of getting well. Next morning, to their surprise, he was still alive and not apparently sinking. When he asked to see the Sourabaya manager of the Hong-kong & Shanghai Bank, they saw no harm in humoring a dying man who wished to straighten out his affairs, and went to some trouble in arranging for a short interview. When the manager appeared and the nurse left the room, his manner was genially sympathetic—knowing as he did some of the more confidential data concerning the patient. The interview was necessarily brief and to the point.

"Glad to see you, sir! You've heard of my work and adventures in Mong Klang? I'm the Rajah—documents in your Singapore branch—British Commissioner up there—notified. Kutyawlat's men on my trail since I left. Played sicker than I was, on steamer, to see if I couldn't spot 'em. They came aboard—Batavia—knifed me before I knew who or where they were. I'm not as weak as doctors think—going to pull through if I can! But—save me lots of trouble—if supposed to have died. See? Gives me better chance to arrange for—going back. Want you to pay doctors and nurses well, for me. Arrange to send me up—Tosari Sanatorium—soon as possible. Sneak me out of here at night—go up in motor-car—under another name, temporarily. Got to fool everybody except two doctors and one nurse. Let 'em bury somebody else—my name—but notify your other branch houses that it's a fake. Charge my account with all expenses. See to the whole business for me, will you? That's a good chap!"

ON the second day, the "man in Number 58" was still alive, much to the astonishment of Doctors Van Wiart and

Glendenning. On the third day, he seemed not only to be holding his own but to be a little stronger. That evening the bank manager had a confidential interview with them, in which he gave a brief account of Jardine's recent activities, with the fact that he was legally the present Rajah of Mong Klang—also a hint of the Burmese assassins on his trail and the advantage of his being temporarily reported dead. They had been much interested in the case before, and were doubly so after hearing something of the patient's history.

For two weeks, the man continued to show a slow but steady improvement which convinced the nurses that he would probably recover. Yet the doctors shook their heads rather dubiously. Something about the heart-action—poison from the fever still in his blood—these things were merely indicated by looks and shrugs—unfinished remarks. Then one night when the interne and the nurses on duty were sitting around the desk in the hall, upon which they wrote out their reports, Number 58's special nurse and Dr. Glendenning came hurrying down the little side-passage to his room. It would have been violating hospital etiquette for any of the others to crowd after them unless called for—but they kept watching the little corridor. In a few moments, the nurse came out for two orderlies and a stretcher. Then a motionless figure covered with a sheet was brought out and taken down to an undertaker's wagon.

AS far as the hospital staff knew, this was the wind-up of "Number 58." But a high-powered touring-car ran up into the mountains that night with a convalescent and fully clothed man. He had arrived at the Simpang Hospital clean-shaved. After ten days at the Tosari Sanatorium, he had a noticeable mustache and Van Dyck, and was dividing his time between slow walks along the ridge, from whose six thousand foot altitude the wide Strait of Madoera is in plain sight, and long naps in his deck-chair.

Leading newspapers of the Archipelago and belated copies of European periodicals were available for everyone—but were read more thoroughly by Jardine than most of the other convalescents, as he had a more personal interest in keeping track of current Asiatic events. But one afternoon, when the latest editions came up from the nearest railway station, his fel-

low invalids were discussing with much excitement a most amazing occurrence in Singapore before he happened upon the columns devoted to it. The headlines in the *Straits Times*, a leading evening paper of Singapore, first caught his eye, though the Sourabaya sheets were of four days later date.

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF THE "GLOWING EMBER," WORLD'S GREATEST RUBY

Worn by Miss Grace Armitage of New York at the fancy-dress ball given by His Excellency at Government House on Saturday night, and pronounced by experts to be the largest, most beautiful ruby known to exist. A full description of this marvelous stone, with details of its cutting in Amsterdam three years ago, will be published in tomorrow's issue. But more immediate interest centers in the mysterious disappearance of the jewel while the ball was at its height!

The article then described the striking costume worn by Miss Armitage as a Hindu ranee—the peculiar appropriateness of such a jewel to her own beauty—her being chosen to lead the grand march with the Governor himself—the clumsiness of another partner in slipping and falling with her during one of the dances, tripping down another couple with them—her discovery that the jewel was missing when they got upon their feet again—the suggestion of a guest in mandarin costume that the nearest half-dozen couples should submit to being searched at once to prevent unfair suspicion—the rewards offered by His Excellency and Miss Armitage for return of the jewel or definite information concerning its whereabouts—and the failure to find any trace of it whatever. There was more—in fact. The occurrence was for weeks the greatest sensation in the Asiatic ports, column after column being devoted to discussion and speculation in all the papers, and presently in European sheets.

The immediate effect upon Jardine was that of amusement—then speculation upon his own account, with a good deal more knowledge of what might have happened, since his supposed possession of the stone was partly the cause of his being so nearly killed on the steamer—that and his inheritance of the *musnud* at Mong Klang. It had not seemed likely to him that Miss Armitage would ever discover the ruby inside its casing of Portland-cement unless

it happened to fall upon some harder object with sufficient force to crack it open. But knowing that his chance of surviving the deep knife-wounds was a doubtful one under the most favorable conditions, he gladly took the gamble of her discovering and keeping the jewel because of her plucky attempt to save him by shooting his assassins. Whether, during convalescence, he had in mind some hazy notion of some day buying back the bit of cement-casting from her is doubtful. The ruby had been, of course, a possession of almost incredible value which any man would prefer to keep; but somehow this girl attracted him more than any other he had met. He liked to think of her owning and wearing the jewel. Although the Medfords had warned her against wearing such a stone at the Governor's ball—in many ways, a dangerous thing to do—Jardine understood perfectly her compelling desire to display it publicly—once, anyhow—even at the risk of getting in trouble with it. In her place, he would have done the same thing; it was, to him, additional proof of her unusual nerve.

Now, however, she had lost it,—through no fault of hers, as far as he could see—and it was likely to be the sport of chance until it came into the hands of some one strong enough to keep it. For there was no doubt in the archæologist's mind that it had been stolen through a most carefully worked out plan, of which he meant some day to discover the true inwardness. Knowing as he did the almost incredible wanderings of most great jewels, any chance of his recovering or tracing it seemed farcical; but Jardine had absorbed enough Oriental fatalism to believe that the ruby would make its proximity felt in subtle ways even if merely reacting upon the nerves of the man or woman in whose possession it happened, temporarily, to be. Being almost fully recovered by this time, he had been thinking of getting back to Singapore, and, eventually, to Mong Klang, as soon as he had tested out certain theories based upon a discovery in the old temple he had unearthed. So, upon the following morning, he said good-by to his Tosari friends—who had no idea who he really was—and went down to Sourabaya, where he had a confidential interview with his bank manager, obtained his luggage, and arranged certain matters of business which were to be handled through the bank or its branches.

HAD anyone suggested to Jardine his taking over the government of a native hill-province like Mong Klang, before his stay there, the idea would have seemed preposterous. But the old Rajah had been progressive, with projects for the development of his country which appealed to the archæologist very strongly, and he was now thoroughly interested in seeing what might be done with such a territory. He was of the temperament and imagination that win not only strong personal liking from Asiatics but faithful service besides—and having been the adopted heir of their beloved Rajah, a majority of the Burmese in Mong Klang were much inclined to serve him in every way they could. There was, however, a vindictive influence against him on the part of Kutyawlat, one of the harem women suspected of having poisoned the Rajah, and a faction of the native *tuans* who thought they had more to gain from her favor than from an outsider. The intrigues of this lot constituted his greatest danger in attempting to assume the government. But an idea had occurred to him which offered a possibility of backing in a quarter that most Caucasians would have overlooked.

Mong Klang lies in the section where borders of Siam, Indo-China, Burma and Yunnan meet—a back country with a strong mixture of Chinese and Shans in its population, as strongly imbued with Chinese customs and superstitions as any others of their nationality. With these facts in mind, Jardine hunted up the *toko* which was merely an insignificant blind to the larger activities of a wealthy Chinese merchant in Sourabaya—one Li-wok Hsu. It proved a somewhat difficult matter to obtain an interview with the man himself, as he was seldom in the *toko*; but the archæologist finally impressed his *comprador* sufficiently to get the address of Li-wok's suburban bungalow and telephoned permission to call, which he did as soon as he could be driven there. The merchant received him courteously, glanced searchingly at his face once or twice as if trying to recall a resemblance; then smiled, and shook hands a second time. He was a graduate of an American college, with a precise English that was better than most of his former classmates used.

"I confess that I could not place your Highness at first! The Van Dyck makes quite a difference—and the report that you

died in the Simpang Hospital has been generally accepted." (Jardine was more surprised than he cared to show—becoming instinctively cautious.)

"Are you quite sure that you're not taking me for somebody else, sir?"

"Fairly so—though it is possible to be mistaken, of course. It is a matter of record that you were invariably considerate and just to those of our people who worked under you upon the temple excavations in Mong Klang, and that you prescribed for some who were sick. That sort of thing creates personal interest in a man of alien race anywhere in Asia. We naturally observed the favor shown you by the Rajah—and have our own reasons for believing that you are now his successor upon the *musnud*. Many of our educated class have familiarized themselves with your appearance from such pictures as have appeared in connection with your professional work—as we do in the case of any leading person with whom our people are likely to come in contact."

"Then—you think I may reasonably count upon their support, as far as such influence may be exerted, when I return to Mong Klang?"

"Your Highness may depend upon that, I can assure you!"

"I appreciate this very much, Li-wok. There is another matter upon which I came to consult you. Presumably, you are familiar with the meaning of this ideograph—eh?" (He rapidly sketched a rather involved ideograph which was apparently Chinese, yet bore suggestions of Sanskrit and Malay in some of the strokes. As he completed the last one, a peculiar expression glimmered for a second in the Chinese merchant's face—which immediately settled into that baffling immobility which so effectually conceals an Asiatic's thoughts.)

"I've already said that our people would support your Highness in every way that might be expected of them. This, of course, makes it obligatory in all circumstances—even in matters of life or death. We were not aware that—"

"One moment, Li-wok! I can't permit you to remain under a misapprehension concerning me. Frankly, I haven't a clear idea as to the modern use of that ideograph, myself. It appears, twice, among the minute carvings upon that old temple in Mong Klang, which has been twenty feet underground for upwards of two thou-

sand years—centuries older than Angkor Wat. From some of the bas-reliefs, I infer that your people were in possession of that territory for a long time—possibly at different periods. This ideograph may have been the cipher of some Tartar emperor in the old days—but I think it more probably the secret sign of some political organization which controlled even the emperor himself, judging from its association with certain other carvings. Are you willing to give me any modern data concerning it? Or is that a delicate question, best forgotten?"

"Your Highness has given us information, as it happens, which ordinary courtesy would compel us to supplement with anything we can honorably tell you. We didn't know the organization existed that far back in antiquity—you have strengthened its power by your archaeological discovery. Many thousands of Chinese will go to Mong Klang in future, merely to see those little carvings on a temple which has been underground that long. The ideograph, today, is the official cipher of the Great Tong. It may not be used by anyone who is not a member under penalty of death and the tormenting of one's ancestors by many devils—but your contribution to the Tong history obviously entitles you to being considered an honorary member. None of us will question your use of it in an emergency. You'll find it surprisingly effective, I think, whenever its use seems advisable."

LEAVING on a Koninklijke boat that afternoon, Jardine was in Singapore four days later, and, to give his changed appearance a fair test, secured a room at the Raffles. His plans for returning to Mong Klang had not been fully worked out. There was no immediate need of acting in that direction because the British Commissioner had been notified in a code message from the Straits authorities that he was alive and would turn up there in due time. But the affair of the Glowing Ember and its mysterious disappearance intrigued him in much the same manner as a problem in chess—aside from the great value and beauty of the stone itself. During his professional wanderings in Eastern waters, he had met Captain Jim Medford and the two companions who, with him, had gone through such amazing adventures in the Archipelago as to become celebrities—something more than

that among the brown races, on account of several things they had done for Asiatics of one caste or another. The meeting had been merely a casual one—at a public dinner given in their honor at the Singapore Club—but it had struck Jardine at the time that, if he ever experienced a need for a few dare-devil companions in some dangerous enterprise—men with both executive ability and initiative—he would not be able to find their equal anywhere in Asia. It now occurred to him, after his first tiffin at the Raffles, that Captain Medford and his wife had been mentioned by Miss Armitage as her most intimate friends in the Archipelago—and could probably give him more inside facts regarding her experience with the great ruby than anyone else. By a little guarded telephoning, he ascertained that the Medfords were aboard their motorship, the *Bandarwallah*, and that Miss Armitage was entertaining friends at tea in her father's bungalow at Tanglin. With a barely suppressed chuckle under the now thick mustache, he called one of the hotel boys and dispatched a brief chit with the object of forestalling a severe shock when they met:

"Mark Twain once said that 'the report of his death had been very much exaggerated.' R. J."

Strolling down to Johnston's Pier, he stepped aboard a power-launch and ran out to the *Bandarwallah*, lying over near Pulau Brani Reef at the entrance to Keppel Harbor. Captain Jim and Pauline Medford were dozing in hammocks under the after-deck awning, but greeted the visitor with their usual cordiality—not recognizing him in the least. Glancing about to see that no sampan or launch was near enough for what was said to be overheard, the archæologist pulled up a deck-chair, motioning them back into their hammocks, and lighted one of the Captain's cigars.

"You don't recognize me, of course—might not even recall my face without the beard, as we've met but twice. Miss Armitage may have told you of her leaving me in the hospital at Sourabaya, pretty seriously knifed—I believe my death has been reported since then. But this note of introduction from the manager of the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank, here, will be all the proof you need as to my identity."

"What! By thunder! Mr. Jardine? Upon my word, this is a most delightful surprise to us! Of course we've heard about you—from other sources than Miss Armitage. Some of our friends are in the British Secret Service, you know—they've dropped hints—say they understand the Commissioner in Mong Klang would recognize you as the Rajah if you turned up alive, and seemed to believe you were alive in spite of the reports. Nobody else did. Grace Armitage had cables from those Sourabaya doctors every day—they said you'd passed out with heart-failure, one night. That was your doing, of course—and we can easily understand the motive. Experiences like that attack upon the steamer are as well to avoid in future if one can. By the way—you'll very likely feel a bit sore at me for noticing the discrepancy in the weight of that cement-casting, and splitting it—"

"Oh—that's how she discovered the ruby, eh? I've been wondering about that. Well, any girl would be tempted to wear such a thing if she had it—I'd have done it myself in her place. But the way it was stolen must have been very carefully worked out—devilish clever work! Tell me about it, will you?"

"You seem to be quite sure it was stolen?"

"Not a doubt of it! Otherwise, the stone would have been found before this. The Governor wouldn't be satisfied with any careless search—"

"You're dead right he wasn't! He's very much cut up over the occurrence—has every branch of the Government Service working over it. But the stone appears to have been simply blotted out of existence!"

MEDFORD described in detail the night's events at the Governor's ball and the apparent impossibility of anyone's knowing in advance that Miss Armitage either owned such a ruby or intended to wear it on that particular night. He wound up with a few comments upon the man Garford, who had appeared at the ball as a Chinese mandarin and, with his partner, also had been tripped up by the officer when he fell with Miss Armitage.

"Grace failed to recognize him that night, owing to the long false mustache and goggles which he wore. Wouldn't believe me when I afterward told her the mandarin was 'Bucko Bill' Garford—said

that such a man would never have been invited to that ball. But Garford is a good deal of a character—makes a rather attractive showing when he likes. He was invited all right—at the request of two very popular men, here. Of course, Miss Armitage had pretty good circumstantial reasons for suspecting the fellow upon different occasions, one of which came under our observation. But I doubt if anyone ever proved anything criminal against him—”

“Hmph! I know he held my arm that night on the steamer so I couldn’t get at my gun while the Burmese was knifing me! Reckon there isn’t much question but that Garford got the ruby—and worked out his plan some days ahead, too! He was undoubtedly after it with those Burmese on the steamer, you know.”

“But—dammit! We searched the fellow inside-out, at his own request, with six other men, before he had any chance to conceal the thing! Then he was attacked after leaving Government House—going down the hill-road in his rickshaw. When some other guests rescued him, he had nothing left but his underclothes—the gang got away with his mandarin costume, every shred of it—”

“Having their own reasons for thinking he had the stone! You see? Very likely there were other plots to get the ruby that night—plots difficult to carry out because the crew who hatched them found it impossible to get into that ballroom. That’s where Garford put one over on them. Knowing the fellow as some of them probably did, they were laying for him when he came out and started for his hotel—making a cat’s-paw of him would have seemed a pretty good joke, if they got the ruby. No use arguing that nobody could have known Miss Armitage possessed the stone and meant to wear it that night, because it’s quite evident that Garford and others did know, or considered the probability strong enough to work out schemes for getting the thing. Did Garford have anything in his pocket when searched, in which the ruby might have been concealed?”

“Nothing big enough to carry that stone, except possibly his silver water-pipe—”

“What’s that! He had one of those pipes? Did you take it apart?”

“Of course not! While he waited for us to search the men ahead of him in that

little dressing-room, he lighted up the thing and was smoking it! Set it down on the table in plain sight of everyone while we went through him!”

“**B**Y Jove! That scoundrel is no fool! He’s dangerous anywhere you find him! Deuced clever trick, that! And it would work ninety-nine times out of a hundred. Did you hear the water bubbling in the lower chamber whenever he took a puff?”

“Hmph! Now I think of it, I don’t recall any such noise—and I was standing near him, too. Of course with all the excitement, and trying to make our search a thorough one, we wouldn’t have thought to listen for anything of the sort—”

“No, but you’d have heard it subconsciously if he took anything like a good pull on that pipe—”

“He sure did—we all noticed the quality of tobacco he was smoking! Say, Jardine! I’m beginning to think you’ve solved the mystery of that stone’s disappearance! It could have been hidden in that pipe—and of all the people at that exclusive ball, Garford was undoubtedly the most likely to have stolen it! But the knowledge doesn’t seem to get us much farther. The other guests who rescued him from those thugs on the way down the hill took him to his hotel—waited until the doctor patched up a nasty cut in his shoulder and a few other scratches. He had nothing left but his underclothes—certainly didn’t have that silver pipe! The gang who attacked him seemed to be Malays and Chinese coolies. They undoubtedly got the pipe—with his mandarin clothes. Question is, would they take it apart?”

“Chances are they wouldn’t. Men of that caste don’t smoke silver mandarin pipes because too many questions would be asked as to where they got one—where they stole it—whom they killed when they got it? They don’t use that sort of thing themselves—it isn’t rank enough, and they’re not accustomed to handling such pipes. The smell would have been fresh enough to show that it had been recently smoked. That would throw them off the track as it did you. No—if that gang really got the pipe, or if some Asiatic picked it up afterward near where Garford was attacked I’d say their first impulse would be to sell the thing for what they could get—”

"That line of reasoning strikes me as being sound. There wouldn't be more than two kinds of markets for such a pipe in any Asiatic city—the pawnbrokers, and the curio-shops. I'd say the curio-shops for probability; they'd pay more for a mandarin-pipe in good condition than the pawnbrokers because they could get a curio-price from some European or American."

"Hmph! Might be worth our while to make a little collection of water-pipes. We could take in most of the curio-shops in a few hours—but then we'd have to stop. If we kept at it for more than one afternoon, it would arouse too much comment and curiosity. Carry any collecting fad a bit too far, and it gets about—people wonder what you're up to. Garford will be nosing about the curio-shops himself, but not asking for water-pipes. He's not such a fool as that, knowing the Secret Service men are likely to be watching him pretty closely. Elimination of other possibilities would turn suspicion his way in spite of that supposedly thorough search you made. I say! There's a launch from my namesake's wharf which appears to be coming out to you with a lady on the stern seat! Looks something like Miss Armitage, eh?" (Medford focused his binoculars.)

"That's Grace, all right! Wonder what she's got on her mind? Usually telephones out to see if we're aboard."

IN a few moments, the handsome New York girl ran up the accommodation-ladder and came aft to them. She was obviously excited about something.

"Pauline! Cap'n Jim! I've just had some rather startling news—if it's not a joke that somebody played on me! Oh! I beg pardon!" as she noticed the supposed stranger for the first time.

"It's all right, Grace—you've met our friend, here, and he's not the sort to blab. Tell us your startling news."

"Why—if I really understand the chit I got an hour ago, and am not mistaken in the writing, Mr. Jardine didn't die after all! He got well in spite of those frightful wounds and his weak condition! I was so relieved and nervous that I couldn't stay in the house! Somehow, I must get word to him that Bill Garford and possibly some of those Burmese murderers are here in Singapore. He mustn't think of coming here. I—"

There was something about the smile upon the bearded face in the deck-chair which made her catch her breath—and look at it more searchingly. Then—she ran over and impetuously hugged the man from sheer relief and pleasure. During their brief acquaintance upon the "B. P." liner, there had been no suggestion of anything more than friendliness between them—but they had been through an unforgettable experience together, and one doesn't receive a present of a million-dollar ruby from a man without some desire to show appreciation, even after the jewel has been lost. Jardine was touched more deeply by this little demonstration than any of them suspected. As they went on with their discussion of the ruby's disappearance—Miss Armitage giving him her personal experiences that night—she studied his appearance to see how much danger there was of recognition, and presently decided that he was reasonably safe, anywhere. The man she had known before was a semi-invalid who did what he could to accentuate that impression. This Jardine, on the contrary, seemed to be in much better flesh—a muscular athlete, toughened by years of outdoor life—abundantly able to take care of himself, and a dangerous antagonist when he played to win. On the liner, he had enlisted her sympathy and protective instinct. Here in Singapore harbor, he appealed to her imagination.

After a while, there was naturally some discussion in regard to his plans for Mong Klang. It seemed almost suicidal for him to return and attempt to rule the province, inasmuch as there were a number of Burmese in Kut yawlat's faction who would undoubtedly kill him on sight if they could; but he told them things concerning the general mass of his new subjects which made the gamble appear to be at least possible, even with odds against him. He also got them very much interested in his plans for developing the province and improving the condition of his people. Presently, he made a suggestion which had been in his mind for several days.

"I've been wondering whether you three might consider running up there with me to see the country and my old temple? We uncovered and cleared out nearly two-thirds of it—the place in itself is almost worth the trip, considering the amount of authentic Asiatic history carved on its

walls. Aside from that, I can offer a few other inducements—tiger and elephant hunting if you care for that sort of thing—some of the rarest birds and orchids known—and enough rubies in the rough to make the trip worth your trouble. On the other hand, it's only fair to say there's an element of personal risk. If they try to wipe me out, they'll hardly stop at any friends who may be with me, no matter how much they risk in the way of punishment from the British Government. The Commissioner would see that we were avenged all right; but that wouldn't interest us a lot, you know, if we were traveling the 'long trail.' Frankly, it's no proposition for a woman—unless—unless she can handle a gun and likes to play the game regardless of risk. From what I've heard about you ladies, taking a long chance occasionally is rather in your line—eh?" The eyes of the two women were sparkling with excitement. Medford saw that with any encouragement from him they would jump at the chance—and the proposition appealed to his own temperament as well.

"How do you get in there, Jardine? Much of a trek through jungle?"

"Very little of that, as it happens. How much does your ship draw under the screws?"

"Bit over ten feet with the tanks full. But we cut that down to seven when they're pumped out."

"That's about what I figured her. Well, we're fairly into the wet monsoon, now—rivers all getting higher. Except for half a dozen bars, you can get twelve feet of draft up the Salwin River at this time of year most of the way from Martaban to the Mong Klang border. By pumping out your ballast-tanks, there's nothing I know of to stop you short of our little river-town, Mong-sak, where we assemble teak cargoes. From Mong-sak to Klangting—where the palace is located—there is a picturesque and fairly wide logging-trail of possibly twenty miles. One goes up in *dhoolies*, generally. The old Rajah had a couple of motor-cars in which he ran about country. You wouldn't think they'd get through, but I shall take three up with me—one of them armored, in case of a running fight, if anything of that sort happens. I notice your boat has a couple of five-inch rifles and a few machine-guns—enough to stand off any attack upon her—but they might dam the river on

some bar so that you couldn't get out. However, that's a remote contingency. They really have a wholesome respect for the British Raj, when it comes to attacking a steamer."

LEAVING the little party to enjoy their dinner aboard the *Bandarwallah* and discuss their plans, let us go back a few nights to a conversation between a group of prominent business men at the Singapore Club, and to the peculiar experience of one Chang Feng, a merchant of Waterloo Street, who had been pirate and hatchet-man in his youth but whose ostensible business of later years appeared to be entirely, prosperously, respectable. The men at the Club were discussing the still absorbing topic of the Glowing Ember's disappearance and had been commenting upon the beautifully chased water-pipe which had appeared to be an essential part of Garford's mandarin costume at the time he was searched.

"Jolly int'restin sort of curio to have about one's house, don't you know! I've heard that no mandarin ever buys one in a shop—has the thing made for him, specially, with his cipher and other things engraved to suit him. When the chap dies, if there are no sons to inherit, his effects are sold or become scattered about. I fancy that an' plain stealing would be the only ways such a pipe would get on the market. Still, there must be some of 'em in the curio-shops for sale. Stiff price, most likely. Of course, one wouldn't care to smoke the thing—no tellin' what hands it's passed through, or whether it could be thoroughly disinfected. But as a curio, it's the sort of thing that's not to be had by any fool globe-trotter who's pickin' up souvenirs, here an' there. I mean to look about a bit an' get one of those pipes if it can be found."

"H-m-m—I've been thinkin' of that myself, Appleby—ever since the Governor's ball!"

Two of the other men had observed Garford's pipe and itched with the collector's desire to have one of their own—which accounts for the raids upon various curio- and pawnshops during the next few days. For a week past, Bill Garford had been dropping in at one shop after another in a search for odd but inexpensive trinkets which he generally threw away after reaching his hotel. If he happened to notice a silver water-pipe in any of the

shops he examined it, casually, with no great interest—but purchased something else. There was nothing in his manner to suggest that he would have paid, unhesitatingly, a hundred dollars gold for one of those pipes, had it happened to have certain ideographs engraved upon it, and feel a bit heavier than the others.

As for old Chang Feng—of Waterloo Street—who looked a possible forty-eight, but had seen over seventy years of iniquitous, profitable and legitimate adventure—he had paid ten silver dollars to a boat-coolie one night for a mandarin-pipe which the man claimed to have found by the roadside out near the Botanic Gardens, thinking that a safer locality to mention than the road down from Government House where he had actually picked it up at sunrise, an hour after it had been hurled from one of Garford's pockets during the sudden attack upon him. Having other matters upon his mind at the time, old Chang had put the pipe in a carved sandalwood box which contained three or four other pipes of the same pattern, and had then forgotten the transaction entirely.

During the following week, he began to experience what a Caucasian would have considered an attack of nerves. His mind was filled at times with a sense of foreboding—a nameless apprehension. While absorbed in carrying on his various activities during the day, this did not trouble him much; but at night, when he sat alone in the luxuriously furnished room which he sometimes occupied, in a far corner of the big *godown* behind his shop, it would come upon him with almost crushing force—particularly when amusing himself with the wonderful collection of unset jewels which he had accumulated through many years. His first diagnosis was that the spirits of his ancestors were making themselves felt in displeasure at something he had done—so he burned a quantity of paper "cash" in a bronze censer to placate them. When this didn't work, he was convinced that it must be devils—a far more serious matter, inasmuch as they had no personal interest in him beyond pure malevolence. In his growing anxiety to placate these very bad devils, Chang began to study his symptoms in a panic-stricken endeavor to find out just what the Jin wanted.

Presently, he noticed an increase of apprehensiveness when playing with his jewels—and would instantly have given

away the whole collection or destroyed them one by one. But some instinct told him that this was not required—much to his relief. He knew precious stones as few lapidaries know them. He tried the experiment of placing one large stone after another upon his forehead and walking about his *godown* to see if a clue might be obtained in that way; and the experiment seemed to work. Diamonds produced no effect whatever—nor sapphires—nor emeralds. Pearls were merely cold with the chill of the deep sea, as they always are, if genuine. But a fifteen carat ruby seemed to burn until it nearly seared the flesh. The warmth was less perceptible in the remote corners of the *godown*, but increased as he approached the passage leading into his *toko*, or shop, which stood upon the narrow extension of Waterloo Street. In this little shop it grew positively hot as he approached a certain sandalwood box. Taking out of it various curios, one by one, and removing them to the far side of the *toko*, the ruby failed to cool down until he began removing the five mandarin-pipes at the last—and by the same process of elimination, it remained hottest when near one particular silver pipe with beautifully engraved ideographs upon its side. It was more than warm near all of them—which definitely proclaimed the sort of object producing the influence—but it was burning hot when near that one. Chang was too much absorbed in exorcising his devil to notice that it was the one he had purchased from the boat-coolie a week before; but his course was now perfectly clear. That pipe must be disposed of at once, and the other ones as soon as possible. Never again would he be induced to buy or keep such a thing near him. He wouldn't have taken that pipe apart to examine it for a million taels, inasmuch as the devil was undoubtedly squatting in the water chamber of the thing and would expand until he filled the *toko*—the street—all Singapore—if once released.

IT just happened that Chang made this discovery early in the evening following that during which the discussion had taken place in the Singapore Club. While he was carefully replacing various articles in the box, Harry Bartlett came in. Bartlett was a young fellow who had been stranded, penniless, in Singapore by the death of a supposedly rich uncle in New York—had

been put in a position by Chang, who had been under obligations to his father many years before, to make a good-sized stake—and had taken up his residence for the time in Singapore upon a basis of more or less profitable speculation in tin and rubber. Having been one of the party attracted by mandarin-pipes as curios, it occurred to him from past acquaintance that Chang would be likely to have such a thing, if anyone—and he had gone out to Waterloo Street in search of it before the others really started to look for them. Chang sold him the one particular pipe for a hundred dollars, gold—the ridiculous price being a mark of respect to the devil inside—and Bartlett, after a pleasant chat with his old acquaintance, went out with the pipe.

During the next few days, the whole city appeared to have gone crazy over mandarin-pipes. The Medfords, Jardine and Miss Armitage started the thing by an afternoon's search through pawnshops, bazaars and curio-shops—discarding several which, by their weight, could have had neither water nor anything solid inside of them. They finally purchased one each—and took them out to the *Bandarwallah* for careful examination, which resulted only in disappointment. Next day prices for silver pipes went up three or four hundred per cent. A rumor—starting from nowhere—and creeping insidiously about the city—hinted that the wonderful Glowing Ember so mysteriously lost at the Governor's ball had been subsequently concealed in such a pipe—which, in turn, had been lost, sold or stolen.

At one of the shops where the Medfords and their friends were pricing various curios—incidentally asking to look at mandarin-pipes among other articles—Garford had been standing in a rear corner when they came in, and soon guessed what they were really after. How in the world suspicion could have been directed to the water-pipe he had lost, he couldn't imagine—but there was no blinking the fact that people most interested in the ruby were on its trail. In a moment or two, seeing Jardine's profile against the open doorway, something about it struck him as vaguely familiar. Stepping behind a Japanese garden-lantern to avoid recognition, he studied the man closely—watched the little involuntary movements of arms, hands, features, shoulders. In a few moments he became convinced of the man's identity.

His thoughts began racing back and forth over one possibility after another which he might turn to account. They had not purchased his particular pipe, because he knew it wasn't in that shop. Giving them time to get a block away, he strolled over to Rochore Road where he entered one of the bird and beast stores—asking for a certain Burmese who had been lodging over it. Finding the man in his room, he asked what proof he had that Tuan Jardine was dead?

"One of us in that city went to the great hospital each day for word as to the Tuan's condition—claiming to be one he had befriended, upon occasion. At first, he appeared to gain in strength, though 'twas said his heart was bad. Then, one night, he died. His body was carried out to the wagon of those who profit in burying the dead. Later—a grave was dug in the ground back of the Klistian temple. The body was taken there and put in—the earth shoveled on top—it has not been disturbed."

"How do you know it was the same body? How do you know the body was Jardine's?"

"That one stood by the gate as the bearers passed out—and lifted the sheet to look. It was the Tuan Jardine."

"Mebbe so! Say it was—for argument. But he wa'n't dead—no more'n you an' me right now! He's alive—an' he's here in Singapore, travelin' round with the Armitage girl an' them damn Medfords! What's more—you can bet your sweet life he'll be goin' back to Mong Klang soon as he can fix up his arrangements. That guy knows the secret of the old Rajah's private ruby-mine—he'll risk a lot to go back there an' work it!"

"Aie! . . . If this be a true thing, there be those in Mong Klang who should welcome him—that they make sure, next time! The Ranee Kutyawlat and some of the Tuans. Word must go to them at once!"

HAVING started something, Garford spent the rest of the afternoon speculating as to how his knowledge might be used most profitably—looking up the means of transportation to Mong Klang—and conferring with another Burmese at one of the poorer hotels. Meanwhile, the craze for mandarin-pipes was starting the rumors beforementioned, greatly to his disgust. Two days later, Harry Bartlett ran out

to the *Bandarwallah*, where he found Grace Armitage and a bearded stranger whose name he didn't catch—with the Medfords. During the chat, some reference was made to the discussion at the Singapore Club and the fad for collecting silver water-pipes which had spread through the city. Bartlett, as yet, had not heard any rumor connecting the big ruby with one of them, but taxed his friends with having fallen for the mania, as he had noticed them in one of the shops. With everybody going crazy over such things, their chance for getting the right one was presumably gone—so they smilingly admitted having purchased some, and the five went below to the *Bandarwallah's* saloon for a comparison with the specimen which the young fellow drew from his pocket.

"This one of mine looks as if it had belonged to some first chop number one mandarin, and I s'pose he was reasonably healthy—but there's no telling who has been handling or smoking it since. Seems to be pretty rank, inside. I'll boil it before leaving it lying around my rooms, and be on the safe side! Hello! . . . This one of Mrs. Medford's is the twin of it—probably made by the same man!"

The two were, in fact, so nearly identical that the only difference appeared to be in the chasing and ideographs. None of them had examined these very closely because, to the average Caucasian, most Chinese or Japanese ideographs look much alike. Presently, as Wun Hop came in to lay the table for dinner, Bartlett said he must be going and asked if they could put him ashore in the *Bandarwallah's* launch—picking up his silver pipe, as he supposed, from where it lay beside Mrs. Medford's, and slipping it into his pocket. He was urged to stay and spend the evening aboard—but just happened to have made an engagement at the Club which shouldn't be canceled.

After he had left them, Pauline took up her own pipe—as *she* supposed—and put it back in the bulkhead cabinet over the big writing-desk. Then they sat down to dinner and forgot all about the thing. Yet the god of chance, whose sport it is to influence the destinies of all great jewels, had decreed that, for a while at least, the mandarin-pipe in which Garford had concealed the Glowing Ember should rest securely unnoticed, in plain sight, in that bulkhead cabinet of the *Bandarwallah's* saloon.

AT the end of another week, the *Bandarwallah* left port with the Medfords and Miss Armitage, on what was generally understood to be a cruise along the ocean sides of Java and Sumatra, with a later stop at the Andamans, where a schoolmate of Pauline Medford's was still living with the Resident's family. A few days previously, the pseudo Mr. Lattimer—otherwise Jardine—had left on a friend's yacht, destination unknown. And that yacht had been combed from deck to keelson in a search for Asiatics or tough whites who had no business aboard. Inside of ten days, however, the *Bandarwallah* reached the port of Martaban after sunset, with Jardine aboard. Before daylight, she had stowed three high-powered motor-cars and a number of other crates on her decks, and had disappeared up the Salwin River.

For once, Bill Garford was at sea without much plan as to what he wanted or could do next. The two Burmese, when he had pointed out the bearded Jardine to them, were quite positive they had never seen the man. Garford himself wasn't so sure at the second look, in broad daylight—but, on the mere chance of being right, he made them send up word to Mong Klang that the Rajah was alive and would soon reappear there. No connection appeared between Jardine's movements and those of the Medfords after leaving on different boats in different directions, so the deep-water bucko wasted a fortnight deciding, without much interest, on his next move.

Meanwhile, the new Rajah and his friends had reached his logging town on the river without mishap—picking up the British Commissioner for Mong Klang at a town farther down the river, where a light-draft gunboat had been surveying and was remaining within call in case he needed assistance. He seemed very much pleased and relieved at Jardine's return.

"I've told the Tuans and the old Woongyre that Governm't had recognized you as the Rajah, old chap, if it proved that you were still alive. The Straits Government advised me that your papers were entirely legal. Quite right to leave 'em down there in a safe-deposit box. Now—question is—would you best take possession of the Palace, or not? It'll mean cleanin' out Kutyawlat an' her crowd—you'd not be safe a minute with them in the same building, I fancy! Of course, I've been more or less administering the

province until you or some other genuine Rajah turned up—but it's been lookin' as though I might have to call for troops—any time."

"I've been going over the situation, Colonel. Nothing else to do but take up my residence in the Palace—they'd all laugh at me if I didn't! But I'm going to 'make a little medicine' first—as we say in the States—and I think it'll work."

With some knowledge of the uncanny way in which news travels among Asiatics, particularly among the Chinese, he felt certain that his coming was not only known in Mong Klang considerably in advance of their arrival, but that his connection with the dreaded Great Tong was being whispered from one end of the province to the other, many of the Chinese and Malays searching the sculptured bas-reliefs of the old exhumed temple until they found the tiny reproductions of the dread ideograph, carved thousands of years before, and considering him with mingled fear and respect in consequence. He even followed their line of reasoning pretty accurately. "If the great Tuan were not one of the ancient Tong itself, how could he possibly have told them exactly where to dig for the buried temple which, in the oldest traditions of their families, had been scarcely more than a legendary myth? How would he have dared to grasp a springing cobra by the neck with his bare hands, to save the old Rajah's life? Why would the Rajah have made this Caucasian his heir? How could he have gotten out of Mong Klang alive—recovered from the assassin's knives on the ship—if he were not a superman?"

With these probabilities in mind, Jardine had had embroidered with black silk upon the left side of his white-linen coat, a small reproduction of the mystic ideograph; also, just under the aigrette of the green-silk turban he wore when dressed in native costume. Having been in Mecca as the guest of a high Turkish official, and so entirely conversant with everything in the Kaaba enclosure, the *Bandarwallah* had fetched up for him a staff of trustworthy Chinese cooks. The Commissioner had told him that ten of the most influential Tuans had come to him with requests that they might render homage to the Rajah upon his arrival and place at his disposal a guard of their own people amounting to five or six hundred men armed with Lee-Medfords and automatic pistols.

Taking up temporary quarters in the Rajah's bungalow, ashore, he received these loyal chiefs at an informal durbar—accepted their allegiance in such a manner as to make them devoted to his interests—and commanded that Kutyawlat, with all the Tuans of her faction, be sent for at once with orders to appear before him next morning. Two months before, most anyone in Mong Klang would have laughed at the idea of her obeying any such order. Now, however, when she herself actually did laugh—scornfully—vindictively—the loyal Tuans who had brought the summons merely looked at her in a pitying, contemptuous manner, and waited for her to pack up. Their orders had been to make a clean sweep of the Palace; they had men enough in every part of the building and compound to do it, but they made no suggestion of force. One of them merely asked if she knew who and what the Rajah actually was? In a moment or two, a streak of fear went through her brain. She had boasted that Jardine would die within twenty-four hours after his arrival. Now she was by no means sure of living that long herself.

When brought before Jardine in the morning, with her Tuans and weakling son, he said that a residence had been prepared for her at the other end of the province—that she would be under espionage, but not molested as long as she respected his laws and his rule. As for her Tuans, they would be permitted to live in their own houses as before—but would be hanged at the first treacherous act.

IT was inevitable, of course, that neither Kutyawlat nor the more fearless of her Tuans would rest content with this decision. Three times, the Rajah's Chinese cooks—in testing food for him and his guests upon various animals, according to their custom—saw pets die in convulsions from poison. Once, when they suspected a Burmese who had brought in a basket of fruit, they watched him die rather painfully after being forced to eat some of it. A bullet fired in the jungle one day, passed between the Rajah's arm and side—but the assassin didn't live to fire a second one. An invisible network of protection surrounded Jardine and his friends wherever they went; it was by no means entirely Chinese, either. The Burmese were beginning to fear and respect him so greatly as to feel something like worship for a man

who seemed to have been predestined as their Rajah three thousand years before. There was the ideograph on his turban, under the scintillating forty-carat diamond which he habitually wore when in native costume; there was the same dread symbol carved in age-old stone upon the temple-wall.

AT the end of three weeks—when matters were sufficiently settled to make jungle excursions comparatively safe—he took the Medfords and Miss Armitage down into the lower chambers of the old temple one day, and through a long subterranean passage which terminated in a cave, one side of which had been partly exposed by a landslide several years before. Peering out of this, they saw a sheer descent of three hundred feet to the bed of a brook in a ravine which was choked with jungle-growth and so full of cobras that none of the natives dared to explore it.

"That ravine was where the Rajah picked up thirty or forty rubies—among them, I suppose, the Glowing Ember—and it's a miracle that he wasn't bitten to death by the snakes. Probably watching out for them pretty carefully, I suppose. But all of that gravel and clay down there came from the other end of this cave when the landslide tore into it. Come over here where a little brook trickles through! There are some picks and a couple of spades. Dig around a bit while I stand guard at the passage from the temple—Medford knows how rubies look in the rough, and one of you ladies can hold my electric torch. I've put a death taboo on all lower chambers of the temple including this passage, which I think they never saw. I don't suppose any Asiatic has nerve enough to venture down, but it's just as well to be on the safe side."

In the course of the next two hours, Grace Armitage and Captain Jim managed to find over thirty rubies which ranged, in the rough, from three to fifteen carats and would probably cut to half the size. Carefully stowing them in various pockets, they concealed the shovels and picks, then followed the Rajah back through several passages to the upper air. Running down to the river by motor, over a road which had been greatly improved since their arrival in the province, they had dinner on the *Bandarwallah* and then,

with the saloon-doors locked, divided the rubies into three equal graded parts. All four had been handling the stones, but it was Pauline Medford who first mentioned a peculiarity which all had subconsciously noticed.

"Do you know—there's the queerest feeling about these stones! If I didn't know it was arrant nonsense, I would say that some of the larger ones feel actually hot, at times. And I fancy that when I hold one at arm's length toward the stern of the ship, it feels warmer than when I hold it with the other hand! Just nervous tension, I suppose—it's odd how excited one gets when handling jewels worth as much as these probably are!" (Jardine had looked up with a peculiarly alert expression.)

"If one could permit himself to believe in Asiatic superstitions, which they all claim are based upon occult influence or knowledge, there might be a rather amazing explanation for the sensation you describe, Mrs. Medford! Many Asiatics will tell you that all great jewels exert a definite magnetic influence over lesser jewels of the same family—the influence increasing with proximity and decreasing with distance. I don't believe there's the slightest scientific foundation for any such apparently ridiculous idea, but the natives will assure you that it is so—" The women were staring at him breathlessly.

"Then—if there really were anything in the belief? . . . You—you think—it might be—that—?"

"What I think—I hardly know, myself. But many of the Burmese would say—after the demonstration you've just had with these rubies—that the Glowing Ember must be at this moment not only somewhere in Mong Klang, but probably within a mile of this ship! Of course it's entirely possible—there's no human accounting for the chance wanderings of any great jewel—sold—given away—stolen—or lost—all the chance happenings on its mileage-ticket. But we'd be just as much at sea in trying to locate it as we were down in Singapore."

The supersition colored their talk for the rest of the evening—ran through their dreams. Yet none of them even glanced at the mandarin-pipe in the bulkhead cabinet. That was a closed chapter. Why should they?

Another of these remarkable stories by Culpeper Zandt will appear in the next issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.



Pulling Power

A Potluck Hewitt Story

By WILLIAM HARPER DEAN

NORMALCY, everybody said, was fast materializing. And for proof they offered the fact that silk shirts were down to half-price and begging for buyers, that cotton-field blacks had stopped buying pianolas and six-cylinder cars, that baking-soda had taken a decided slump and that sugar was down to six.

And so there was much rejoicing among those who had invested their wartime earnings in Liberty bonds and kept up their life-insurance and refused to wear silk shirts to work, or ride in mortgaged automobiles. In other words, the tribe that is not stampeded by prosperity, those people who stabilize civilization, economics and everything else worth while, were heaving sighs of relief. They are the ones who compose that great class which Voltaire was constrained to liken unto the good, wholesome liquor between the dregs and foam of the cask of beer, when that celebrity went to great pains to find a happy simile for the English people of his day and time.

But if sugar and silk-shirts and baking-soda were down, so was cotton. If a dollar had begun to be worth more than fifty-cents, likewise there were fewer dollars. And if this condition presaged normalcy, thought Mr. Womble, on the sweltering June morning which marks the opening of this chronicle, then he greatly preferred abnormalcy and a return to wartime financial hysteria. For at the rate he was going, bankruptcy was gaining on him at every jump.

Everything was normal except business. The truth is, there were no takers for the "unparalleled price reductions" which had signalized the opening of Mr. Womble's clothing emporium in Baton Rouge. His offerings were *bona fide*; his suits were handled direct from maker to wearer, his window display was quite alluring. But of custom there was none. And the reason Mr. Womble was at a loss to understand.

He could not figure how it was possible for him to offer a genuine hand-tailored suit of A-1 goods and workmanship for \$27.98 and not be stampeded with buyers.

The advertising solicitor for *The News* had offered Mr. Womble quick and positive freedom from the quagmire of business stagnation, through the medium of that sheet's advertising columns. But Mr. Womble was frightened and had conceived the idea that every penny spent now dragged him so much nearer the yawning pit of business oblivion. So he steadfastly refused to advertise and perspiringly awaited the crash.

THERE were others who were feeling the shock of a return to normalcy. Though he had no investments at stake, Potluck Hewitt's spirit groaned. Of easy money there was none: the clientele with which he dealt was flat broke, to the jubilation of plantation owners, who could now count on a fairly steady supply of labor at wages less closely approximating the salaries of corporation directors. Potluck's tapering fingers threatened to lose their cunning for lack of exercise.

Furthermore, he was bereft of the one asset which more than once had borne him from penury to a transient opulence. His clothes betrayed him. That shepherd's plaid was threadbare, the gray derby with polka-dot-scarf band belonged to the discard, his shoes were bursting at the seams. And his stomach was rapidly approaching a state of absolute vacuity, for his credit at Aunt Henrietta's had reached the limit of its elasticity and snapped.

As he walked slowly, aimlessly past the old Saint James Hotel, he longed to turn up those steps and knock on the door of the only white man whose patience and indulgence were not spent things. But he didn't turn, for only yesterday Todd Roane, in all seriousness, had warned him that if he didn't go to work and cease trying to borrow money, he would prod him into productive labor with the long arm of the law. Also, Potluck knew that Todd Roane at this moment was far down the river on his plantation.

So he passed the Saint James, mutely sympathizing with his fortune to be a walking confession of poverty on the very day when there were coming from New Orleans a score of visitors, among whom he knew should be at least one willing victim of his wily play. As it was, he meant to keep severely away from those visiting delegates from the New Orleans Chapter of the Beneficent Order of Galilean Fishermen. He might as well offer himself as a walking

advertisement for a tailor shop as to approach that crowd in the hope of winning such degree of respect and confidence as eventually would lead to the craved-for game in the year of Aunt Henrietta's Chicken and Waffle Kitchen. If he only had the clothes!

Abruptly he stopped before the show window of Mr. Womble's clothing emporium. For the paltry sum of \$27.98 he might have a tailored-to-measure suit that would literally waft him into a seasonal prosperity. His eyes lingered hungrily on a ready-made suit of shepherd's plaid gracing the slender figure of a dummy with the burnsides of a Chester Arthur and the beetling brows of a Clemenceau. And only \$27.98!

"Boy, would you like to have that suit?"

Potluck started from his reverie and looked up to see Mr. Womble, bald-headed, pudgy, perspiring, and with lines of care across his forehead, gazing at him without the faintest ray of hope lighting his troubled countenance.

"Mawnin', Cap'n; yassuh! Dat's mah speshul kind. See, Cap'n?" He indicated the threadbare suit he wore. "Dis was de splendidist suit in Bat'n Rouge Pa'ish a li'le while back. Ax ennybody ef Potluck Hewitt weren't de spo'tiest nigger 'twixt heah slap tuh N'Leans!"

A faint glow of hope shone in Mr. Womble's eyes. "Well," he said, "this one is just as good as yours ever was, and I expect it will fit you just as it is. If you want it, you can have it for ten dollars down. Can you give any references?"

"You mean white folks what know is Ah honus'?" The negro was instantly alert. "Cap'n, all de folks know me! Jes' tek' Cap'n Roane, f'rinstance—"

"Does Todd Roane know you?"

THE negro looked deeply injured. "Know me! Cap'n Roane trus' me wif mo' 'po'tant business den enny nigger in de State! Know me? Boss, ef Ah was tuh step up tuh de Sain' Jeemes en' say, 'Cap'n Roane, pleassuh would you min' tellin' dis gemm'en Ah's good fuh credit?' Cap'n Roane jes' li'ble tuh say, 'Nigger, ef you want dat suit, tell de gemm'en tuh chawge hit tuh me!' Dat's de kinduh gemm'en Cap'n Roane is!"

Over Mr. Womble's troubled countenance had come a great light. "Come inside, boy," he said quickly; "I've thought of something."

Exactly one hour later Potluck Hewitt surveyed himself in Mr. Womble's combination mirrors and inhaled a chest-expanding volume of air, while Mr. Womble stood back and surveyed his handiwork.

The sample shepherd's-plaid suit fitted the negro as though he had been poured into it—tight at the waist, lapels rolling grandly from the narrow chest. Once more the kinky head was crowned with a gray derby, blue-scarfed. A canary-yellow shirt, a white linen collar, reaching well-nigh to the protruding ears, a flaming red four-in-hand, gray spats, saffron shoes, and a slender, yellow cane, completed the properties of the gaudiest negro in all the Mississippi Delta.

"Now stand still a minute," said Mr. Womble. Across the plaid-encased shoulders he pinned a piece of white oilcloth bearing this legend:

A SUIT TO SUIT A KING
TAILORED TO YOUR MEASURE
OF QUALITY EXCEPTIONAL
FOR \$27.98 AT
WOMBLE'S

SATISFACTION OR YOUR MONEY BACK!

"Now," said the proprietor, "you understand the conditions. You are to walk the streets of Baton Rouge six hours a day for two weeks, with that sign on your back, and wearing this outfit. It stands me exactly \$50. It's yours if you live up to the agreement. If you don't, I'll have you arrested for breach of contract. Do you understand?"

Potluck swaggered to the door. "Puffectly, Cap'n, puffectly! Ef Ah doan' sen' you mo' trade den you kin handle, you kin slam me in jail fuh de res' o' mah life! Lemme go, Cap'n, so's Ah kin' staht dis business a-b'ilin'!"

He walked to the street, turned the corner and strutted in a bee line for Aunt Henrietta's Chicken and Waffle Kitchen down on the water front.

There was no question concerning the effectiveness of Mr. Womble's walking advertisement. Men stared as Potluck approached them on the sidewalk, snickered, then turned and stared at his lettered back. Shopkeepers left their counters and stared from doorways. Smile as they would, they realized that Womble had put across something in this fearful hour of prodigal normalcy's return.

Half a block from Aunt Henrietta's, Pot-

luck ducked into a little alleyway. When he reappeared on the sidewalk, the oilcloth sign had vanished. It was folded neatly and buried in his coat pocket. And so into Aunt Henrietta's he walked, determined to put his time-tried theory to yet another test.

THE room was crowded with blacks, at sight of whom Potluck brought up sharply in the doorway and stared calculatingly. It was not the usual crowd of water-front blacks in overalls who sat devouring food for which Potluck's very soul cried out. It was an altogether different type of patronage.

Robust blacks in frock coats and with flowers in their buttonholes, blacks in tremendous expanses of white shirt bosoms, cross-scarfed with purple, gold-fringed sashes; blacks in scarlet uniforms, admirals' hats, with their brass horns resting on the floor beside their tables—they all looked up at Potluck.

"Heyo, gemmen!" he greeted, just as Aunt Henrietta appeared in the kitchen doorway and stared incredulously at the metamorphosis of the erstwhile bankrupt.

Potluck saw her, caught his breath. "A'nt Henry," he called with a carelessness he could not feel, "fetch me a li'le snack, ef you please!"

He hung the gorgeous derby on a wall peg, leaned his yellow cane against the wall and drew up a chair to the table at which sat a solitary black dignity attired like a Lord Admiral.

Aunt Henrietta hesitated. Potluck was deep in her debt and had been for weeks. But she had learned to respect the elastic scale by which this individual's fortune ebbed and flowed. So once more she was willing to take a chance. And as Potluck furtively and breathlessly watched her from the corner of his eye, she turned back to her frying.

Potluck heaved a tremendous sigh, mopped his glistening forehead with a baby-blue handkerchief. Then, swallowing heavily, he turned to the admiral person who was stoking a red-lined cave with waffles.

"Well, Mistah Alexander, eve'ything set fuh business, Ah see," commented Potluck, sweeping the room with shifty eyes. "Dis sho' is a splendid tu'nout you fixin' tuh give dem N'Leans delicuts. Galilean Fishermen o' Bat'n Rouge doan' ax nobody nuffin' when hit come tuh tu'nin out!"

Mister Alexander, Royal Commander of the Baton Rouge Chapter of the Galilean Fishermen, nodded and puffed out his chest.

"Yas, we has a ve'y splendid representation, Hewitt."

"You g'wine march dem delicuts up de street tuh de lodge rooms?" inquired Potluck.

Mister Alexander looked hurt. "Why, no, Hewitt! De custom is tuh divide dem 'mongst ouah 'ception committee en' drive up 'hinst de ban'. Man, we's got some twelve kerridges, all tole!"

Potluck raised his eyes approvingly. "Dat's style—dat's class!" he exclaimed. "Sortuh figgerin' on drappin' down tuh de station ma'se'f when de Memphis Mail roll in. Might find Ah's got a friend 'mongst dem delicuts."

As Potluck spoke, Mister Alexander was taking in every detail of the gorgeous civilian attire. "Hewitt," he presently said, "you makes a ve'y good show 'mongst visitin' delicuts. How you lak' tuh j'ine de reception committee?"

"How you mean?" said Potluck cautiously. There flashed across his mind the suspicion that this was some sort of ruse to extract from him those back dues for delinquency for which he had been dropped by the Baton Rouge chapter.

"Jes' j'ine, man; jes' j'ine! 'Tain' g'wine cos' you nuffin'. We needs er represen'tive o' de citizens et large. Ef Ah pins er Committee ribbon on you, you rides in er kerridge 'longside one o' de N'Leans delicuts—dat's all. How dat strike you?"

Aunt Henrietta was depositing a loaded tray before the famished Potluck. Without a word he seized half a chicken in his fingers and devoured it voraciously.

"Sho'," he said wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. "Ah's always glad tuh 'commodeate a frien'."

UNDER the wondering eyes of Aunt Henrietta and the stares of the committee at large, Mister Alexander reached across the table and pinned a purple ribbon on Potluck's shepherd-plaid breast. It bore the magic inscription: "*Reception Committee, B. R. G. F. No. 8.*"

Then Potluck, as he ate, thought deeply. Without this open sesame on his bosom he had planned to meet that crowd of visiting delegates and on the strength of his gorgeous apparel and the inherent weakness of some delegate for a little game in the back

of Aunt Henrietta's kitchen, put crinkly bills in those sleek, untenanted pockets of his. But now an accredited member of the reception committee, he could pick and choose his victim. It seemed too good to be true. He only prayed that Mr. Womble would have no business that took him to the station when the Memphis Mail rolled in from New Orleans.

One by one, committeemen and bandmen finished their repasts, got up and began to assemble on the street outside the eating-house. As Potluck ate on, his keen eyes noted the fact that for some reason Aunt Henrietta paid no attention to her departing patrons. They left the room without settling scores! Then all at once it came to him.

Quickly he swallowed the last fragment of food before him, put on the gray derby, hung the cane on his arm and strutted back into the kitchen proper.

"A'nt Henry," he said, "Ah's on de committee. So Ah 'spec' mah snack's 'ranged fuh by Misto Jackson."

The big negress nodded. "Ef you's on de committee," she said, looking at the official emblem of that fact, "hit's chawged tuh de lodge."

"Co'se, co'se!" muttered Potluck, hurrying out to the sidewalk. "Dat's jes' whut mah s'picious was!"

Outside, the scarlet-garbed band had assembled and the six-foot drum-major in bearskin hat was giving his baton a few practice whirls to the delight of a gaping crowd of blacks lining the curbs. The officials in silk-hats, Prince-Alberts, and flowers in their buttonholes were climbing stiffly into ancient swayback carriages. Two dignitaries in admirals' hats seized the gold-tasseled cords to steady the great banner of the order borne by the official standard bearer. The mounted Mister Alexander flourished a beribboned baton as he rode up and down bellowing orders.

"Hewitt," he called, riding beside Potluck, who stood leaning languidly on his cane, "step up in dat kerridge wif' Gran' Pilot Jackson."

Potluck strolled to the carriage, wherein sat a tremendous black, gently dozing. Potluck seated himself opposite that gentleman, crossed his knees and glanced haughtily at the gaping crowd. In that instant his eyes lighted on a lanky gingerbread negro in overalls, absently munching peanuts as he watched the impressive preparations.

Quickly Potluck turned his head, but not quickly enough. Boojum's jaws stopped working midway in the operation of grinding a handful of goobers. Straight to Potluck's carriage he came.

"Thought you wuz broke!" he denounced. "Howcum you kin git all dem clothes en' ride 'roun in hacks ef you can't pay me dat five dolluhs?"

Potluck frowned, winked and otherwise implored Boojum to desist.

"Hesh!" He leaned over the side of the carriage. "Jes' wait till dis ev'nin', Boojum, en' you'll git dat money wif' intrus'. Gimme elbow room, man; gimme room! Ah's fixin' tuh make 'rangements fuh you right now!"

Monster Grand Pilot Jackson sat with hands folded on his huge stomach, drowsing from the combined effect of a heavy meal and the humid heat of noonday. He opened his eyes and was on the point of making official inquiry into the altercation when the six-foot band-master gave his baton the grandest flourish and every brass horn and hollow drum crashed forth into an ear-splitting march.

The standard bearer and the standard's rope holders stepped forth, the carriages began to roll. And grandly the Baton Rouge Chapter of the Galilean Fishermen advanced to the station to greet the delegates from the Crescent City, while the swelling crowd followed on the brick pavements and surged about the band.

Potluck sat back regally, while Grand Pilot Jackson resumed his interrupted nap. In Potluck's brain were working the factors of a supreme philosophy.

"'Tain' no use," he whispered to himself, "you can't keep a good man down!"

At the station the procession halted, while the Marshal rode down the line of carriages ordering the occupants to alight and assemble. Potluck climbed out behind Grand Pilot Jackson, furtively eyeing the throng for the countenance of Mr. Womble. He failed to detect such a presence, but everywhere he looked he seemed to encounter Boojum's watchfully waiting eyes. The gingerbread negro, to all intents and purposes, was determined to be on hand while Potluck executed such maneuvers as were necessary to reimburse him for that five-dollar loan.

In double file the reception committee formed, then marched under the station shed while the band blared and thumped. Close to the tracks halted the line and

stood shifting in pinching shoes, while perspiration streamed and suffocation threatened from the crowd of onlookers.

The Marshal stepped in front of the line. "W'en de Memphis Mail come in," he shouted, "each membuh of de committee shell receive one o' de delicuts from N'Leans, 'company him to his kerridge en' ride back tuh de lodge rooms fuh de welcome address tuh be presented!"

Scarcely had he concluded when the Memphis Mail blew musically for the station and in another moment rushed up in a tremendous cloud of ballast dust. Out of the coaches poured the delegates, beribboned, perspiring. For the first time Grand Pilot Jackson spoke. He nudged Potluck with his fat elbow.

"Dyah's de Black Di'mon'—dat long, skinny nigger in de brown suit en' de'by," he whispered. "You thinks you's a gamester, Potluck, but dat nigger kin give you cyards en' spades en' tek' yo' money wif his eyes shet!"

Potluck looked. The individual referred to was a coal-black negro of his own height and build, sporting a rather worn fawn-colored suit with pinchback coat, brown derby and white canvas shoes. A half-burned cigar stuck at a rakish angle from the corner of his tremendous mouth.

FOR an instant Potluck hesitated, then broke from the line and approached the New Orleans black with hand extended.

"Howdy, buddy!" greeted Potluck. "Man, Ah's heerd tell o' you lots o' times! Ah betcher you's de Black Di'mon' from N'Leans."

The visiting negro's eyes were feasting on Potluck's glorious raiment—envious, calculating eyes. And mechanically he glanced down at his own rather worn attire.

"Dat's me—who you?"

"You evuh heah o' Potluck Hewitt?"

"Many a time. You on his committee?"

"Shuah! But, buddy, hoccum you'n' me cyarn't slip erway frum dis gang till de speechin's done en' have a li'le meetin' 'mongst ouahse'ves?"

"How you mean?" cautiously asked the Black Diamond.

Potluck whispered into his ear.

"Dat's mah middle name!" grinned the visitor; "let 'er roll!"

Arm in arm, the Black Diamond and Potluck Hewitt fought their way through

the milling jam. The Grand Marshal saw them, so did Grand Pilot Jackson. The former felt he had done a good piece of work when he had made Potluck a member of the committee. But the Grand Pilot, though a slow thinker, discerned things.

"Lam' leadin' lion!" he muttered, blinking slowly as the pair were lost in the jam. "Heah's whah dis Bat'n Rouge spo't g'wine be skinned same's a catfeesh!"

Straight to Aunt Henrietta's side door Potluck conducted the visitor. "Right heah," Potluck was saying, as he gave Henrietta the password wink, "you kin git all de action you wants, an' ain' nobody g'wine 'sturb you. Dis de secrutest place in Louisianny!"

BEHIND the burlap curtain, where stood the table and two rickety chairs, Potluck turned in amazement to stare at Boojum, standing determinedly in the sanctum's entrance.

"You wantuh have a word wif me, Boojum?" queried Potluck, winking.

Boojum's face was stone, his lips were sealed. He stood as one who could be moved by nothing less than tremendous physical force. Potluck stepped close to him as the Black Diamond began to peel off his coat and roll up his sleeves.

"Boojum," hissed Potluck, "git on out'n heah!"

Obstinately Boojum shook his head. "You say you mekin' 'rangemints tuh git me dat five dolluhs. Ah wants tuh be on han'!"

"Ef you doan' git out, you sp'ile de 'rangemints! Dis pahty frum N'Leans ain' g'wine play in de presunce o' strangers!"

Again Boojum shook his head. Ah g'wine stan' right heah! Ef Ah doan', dey ain' g'wine be no game!"

Potluck knew the slow-witted, obstinate Boojum. Also he saw from the corner of his eye that the Black Diamond was beginning to grow suspicious.

"Ef you Bat'n Rouge cott'n-fiel' niggers fixin' tuh pull off any slippiness 'roun' heah," he said challengingly, "yuh bettuh reconsiduh!"

Slowly he drew from his hip pocket a white leatherette case, opened it and extracted the longest, shiniest razor Potluck's bulging eyes had ever beheld. He rested the weapon on the table beside his right arm.

"Is we g'wine do gamin' or is we g'wine not?" he queried.

"Man," grinned Potluck sickly, peeling off the shepherd's plaid coat, tilting the gray derby on the back of his head, "you niggers frum N'Leans is de suspiciousest folks! Ain' Ah 'specially 'p'inted tuh give you de glad han'? Howcum you think enybody tryin' monkey business? We plays on de level in dis town!"

The Black Diamond shrugged his shoulders and nodded sourly in the direction of the statue-like Boojum.

"Oh, him?" exclaimed Potluck. He leaned across the table and toned down his voice to a whisper. "Dat's Boojum. He's loose in de haid. We has tuh humor him. Ain' no hawm in dat nigger."

The Black Diamond seemed to breathe easier. "Well, ef dat's hit!" But he did not put up the razor.

Potluck resumed his seat. From nowhere he had produced a deck of well-worn cards. Carelessly he tossed them across to the stranger. "Look 'em ovuh, pawdnuh. Satisfy yo'se'f dey's reg'lah!"

Eagerly the Black Diamond accepted the invitation. And with such lightning swiftness did his slim fingers run through that deck that Potluck's eyes were filled with wonder, which quickly changed to something akin to genuine alarm.

"All right!" The Black Diamond tossed the cards back to Potluck. "Leave 'em ez dey lay. Lemme see de coluh o' yo' money!"

As he spoke, the visitor slammed to the table a heavy green roll bound with elastic bands.

Potluck moistened his lips, swallowed, rolled his eyes. "Pawdnuh, in de hurry dis mawnin' Ah clean fergot mah change. You haftuh trus' me 'twell de game's ovuh."

The Black Diamond laughed metallically. "Show yo' change or de game's awf. Ah ain' ustuh playin' wif chill'uns."

"Mah money's slap ovuh de othuh en' o' town!" protested Potluck. "By de time Ah step dyah en' back agin, 'twould be too late!"

"All right, how much dat suit en' derby en' shu't en' de rest' wuff?"

For a moment Potluck winced and turned ashy. "Seventy-fi' dolluhs," he answered with a gulp.

The Black Diamond unbandaged the roll, with incredible dexterity whipped off a sheaf of bills, pocketed the balance.

"Heah's fifty. Dat 'g'inst yo' outfit. Tek' hit o' no!"

For the fraction of a second Potluck hesitated. Then: "You's awn! Cut dem cyahds!"

Outside the air was blasted by the crashing syncopation of the scarlet-coated band, as the Baton Rouge Chapter of the Galilean Fishermen paraded back to the lodge rooms with the New Orleans delegates lolling back in swayback carriages. And Grand Pilot Jackson, sitting alone, had folded his hands in his lap and passed serenely into music-lulled slumber.

THE day bore out the promise of the morning and developed into a regular torrid visitation. The little kiosk on the Experiment Station grounds of dignified old Louisiana State University showed a temperature reading of ninety-two, while the dry bulb recorded a humidity of eighty. No human being who has not been up against such a combination has the slightest conception of what that means. And only the people who make that section of the United States their abode know how to conduct themselves under the circumstances.

Mr. Womble was at a handicap. For many weeks he had worried, this morning he was still worrying. And now as the heat became a searing torment and the air rapidly approached the point of saturation with moisture, he worried all the more. Also he fretted over the total lack of custom which to this hour had signalized his sending forth the animated advertisement in the person of one Potluck Hewitt. Consequently perspiration streamed from every pore in his body as he paced up and down the aisle of his store and cursed the return of normalcy.

And to make matters worse, in walked, smiling and dry, Sam Blundon of *The News*. He shook his finger chidingly at mopping Womble.

"Well, old man," he said briskly, "I've fixed it for you this time. I went straight to the Advertising Manager and told him he just *had* to give you a little edge on a contract. You're a new man in town and business hasn't been any too heavy for you. Look here! That full-page spread I wanted to sell you for forty dollars an insertion under a minimum seven-time contract, I've fixed so you can get it for *thirty-five*! How's that?"

Mr. Womble shook his head. "I told

you I haven't any money for advertising now. If you made it twenty dollars I'd say the same thing."

"But look, man! You're being eaten up with overhead here—you've got to pull the people here or close down. You've got a good thing to offer. All you need is to run a full-page spread about it for a week and they'll be standing in line.

Again Mr. Womble shook his head, precipitating a glistening shower of perspiration. "I've worked out a little scheme of my own for pulling people here," he said.

Sam Blundon laughed. "Oh, I run up against that sort of thing all the time, Womble, but it doesn't work. There's nothing like straight advertising for pulling power—I!"

"Blundon," gasped the miserable Mr. Womble, "you're just wasting your breath. It's too hot to argue. Please don't bother me any more!"

The advertising solicitor sighed and almost expired in his exasperation. He walked from the store, while once more Mr. Womble began his restless pacing and wondered why a walking advertisement had not produced a stampede.

IF it was hot outside, it was torment within the unventilated enclosure wherein sat Potluck Hewitt and the Black Diamond. Potluck streamed from ten thousand pores; Boojum stood dripping as he watched the ebb and flow of the game's fortune. But the Black Diamond seemed as dry and cool and keen as the glistening razor beside his elbow.

In the very middle of a hand, the Black Diamond paused and threw down his cards. "Ef mah min' ain' miscalcerlated," he said, "dis closes de case. Dat outfit's mine wif ten dollars tuh de aidge!"

Potluck opened his mouth to argue, then his eyes rested on that razor. He wilted.

"Pawdnuh, you got me right, en' Ah's er man o' mah word. Set still, frien', en' lemme step tuh mah room fuh er change o' clothes en' mah money. Den you kin tek' yo' choice—money aw de suit."

The Black Diamond nodded. "*En'* de derby, *en'* de shu't, *en'* de spats, *en'* de shoes, *en'* de cane," he revised. "But doan' go tuh all dat trouble. Ah'll tek' de outfit—right heah!"

"Right heah—I!" Potluck's consternation was saved from shameless exhibit by a spontaneously manufactured guffaw. "Man, how *kin* Ah shuck off dese things

heah! Ah'd git 'restid ef Ah went froo de streets in mah union suit! Nigger, doan' be so onreasonable!"

"Ah aint," said the Black Diamond grimly. He fished a dollar bill from his pocket and held it out to Boojum. "Son, step out en' buy mah frien' heah a suit o' ovuhawls. Step quick now en' you gits fo' bits fuh yo' speed!"

Boojum grabbed the dollar, shot a wild glance at ashy Potluck, left the enclosure.

"Now, frien'," spoke the Black Diamond, his long hand resting carelessly on the handle of the razor, "shuck off dem things. Ah's in a hurry. Ah got tuh mek' er 'po't tuh dat meetin' 'fo' hit bre'ks up!"

Outside, Boojum stood still, thinking. It mattered not to him that Potluck Hewitt had lost the very shirt on his back and shoes on his feet. But what did matter was that this event automatically forestalled Boojum from collecting the sum of five whole dollars. Down to a dollar suit of overalls, there was no telling how many weeks or months would elapse ere Potluck recouped. But with that suit on his back and those shoes on his feet, Boojum's chances for collecting were par at least.

Boojum was a slow thinker, but a positive one. And now he reached a decision. Like a gingerbread kangaroo he bolted up the street nor slackened his speed until he brought up against a heavy, gray-haired man in linen suit and big Panama hat, standing easily on a shady corner across from the Court House.

"Sheruff Cartuh, pleas suh!" panted Boojum.

The Sheriff looked at Boojum indifferently. "Well, nigger, what?"

"Sheruff, jes' wantuh tell you, pleas suh, dyah's a turr'ble lot o' gamin' goin' awn back'n A'nt Henry's! Dem N'Leans niggers is skinnin' some Bat'n Rouge niggers out'n dee shu'ts!"

Sheriff Carter knew as much, but now he began to suspect more. If one negro was so excited about it and so anxious to put another negro in the toils of the law, there must be at least half-a-dozen more negroes under the wood-pile. He had visions of this tale being a camouflaged invitation for him to visit Aunt Henrietta's and later summons the coroner to hold inquest over a wholesale demise in black. So Sheriff Carter grunted, buttoned up his linen coat, felt his hip pocket and started in a fast walk for the water front. And Boojum followed behind.

Yes, Boojum was a slow thinker. But he had not covered a single block in the wake of Sheriff Carter before it struck him with the abruptness of a bolt of lightning that he was deliberately shattering his last chance of getting hands on that five dollars. Once in the clutch of the law, Potluck, in lieu of the wherewithal to pay a fine, would repose many days in jail. And when he was out again, it would behoove Boojum to stay everlastingly out of Potluck's path, let alone requesting the settlement of that debt. Potluck then would have a score to settle with Boojum.

In spite of the unheard-of heat, Boojum began to feel cold. Also he felt sick at the stomach, and frightened to the point of temporary insanity. Combine these emotions in the breast and brain of a black and something must happen to his feet. And as Boojum was "black," though of gingerbread shade, his feet functioned true to type. He whizzed 'round the corner and tore on the wings of the wind. Straight through Aunt Henrietta's kitchen and into the burlap-curtained sanctum he lunged.

There stood the Black Diamond, gazing rapturously at the pile of plunder on the table—the shepherd's plaid, the yellow shoes, the gray spats, the blue-scarfed derby, the scarlet tie and the yellow cane.

And there stood Potluck dejectedly staring at the same. He stood with all the angularity of his sliver-like frame revealed uncompromisingly through the form-fitting lines of a horizontally-striped union suit.

Conquered and conqueror looked up as Boojum leaped into the enclosure.

"Ga' mighty!" yelled Boojum. "Git out'n heah! Sheriff Cartuh's comin' tuh 'res'—!"

BOOJUM'S work was done. A flash of that striped arm and the entire pile of coveted haberdashery was swept from the table. With a yell, Potluck, clasping the treasures to his breast, whizzed through the kitchen, hit the bumpy brick pavement running. Like an electrified tuning fork he burst upon Baton Rouge to rouse it from its heat stupor and bring it pouring from shops, craning its neck from windows, balconies and doorways.

Sheriff Carter had turned a corner one block from Aunt Henrietta's when he stepped aside to let whizzing Potluck past—and a swelling mob of shouting boys and men, white and black.

"Now what'n hell's up!" snorted Carter. Then he too joined in the pursuit.

Out of the Hall of the Galilean Fishermen the perspiring musicians in scarlet uniform, and the giant drum-major in bearskin hat, had just poured to form for another turnout for the delegates from New Orleans. Through their ranks shot striped Potluck, like a fantastic meteor. To a man the musicians dashed aside their horns and drums, the drum-major jerked off the bearskin hat, and the scarlet horde swelled the pursuing mob.

IT was epochal—the drumming of feet on the bricks, the roar of shouts, the rising dust, and far ahead the noiseless speed of that striped runner who skimmed the ground on feet that never touched brick or cobble behind their toes.

Well Potluck knew what lay ahead if from that thundering pursuit the long arm of Sheriff Carter found his neck. Long had this man striven to fasten justice on the slippery black. And stern now would be the measure of justice long deferred.

And Todd Roane was out of town! Potluck had not a friend. But instinctively his feet spurned the ground to shoot his form closer and closer to the emporium of Mr. Womble, where lay either sanctuary or destruction.

Somebody phoned *The News* that a murder had been committed down on the water front and that a mob was pursuing the murderer all over town, after having torn the clothes from his body. It was a poor time to give a morning paper such a tip, for at that hour the editorial offices were absolutely deserted. Only Blundon sat under an electric fan, trying to compose himself after the failure of his final assault against Mr. Womble's advertising appropriation.

But Blundon took the call and snatched the staff camera. He raced from the building, determined to get a scoop on what sounded like the story of the year. He hadn't the slightest idea what it was all about when his progress was stopped by the solid wall of the mob itself, absolutely damming the street, sidewalks and choking doorways for more than a block. But the disgusted advertising solicitor balanced himself on a fire-plug and shot half-a-dozen exposures of the surging crowd. Subconsciously he registered the intelligence that in every picture the sign "Womble's Clothing Emporium" stretched

squarely across the top of the plate and that the crowd was wedging and straining to force itself into that establishment.

Having exhausted the magazine of plates, Blundon fought and jammed and shoved and wormed his way through that press until finally, panting like mad, streaming with perspiration, his clothing all but torn from him, he gained the entrance of Womble's store. Then he stared.

On a table piled high with Mr. Womble's bargain offers stood a coal-black negro, dripping perspiration, starting eyes rolling, clutching with one hand at Mr. Womble's sleeve. That negro was barefoot and clad in a striped union suit. And, mopping his forehead and expostulating with the terrified Womble, the Sheriff, too, stood on the table in full sight of the crowd.

Carter turned to the jam and raised his arm. "If you people will be quiet for a minute," he yelled, "we'll find out the trouble!"

"Now, nigger!" Sheriff Carter turned to Potluck, whose striped knees were knocking audibly; "what the devil do you mean by running through town in that outfit!"

Potluck only choked and gurgled.

Carter whirled to the crowd, fastened his eyes on Boojum's upturned face. "Boy," he yelled, "was this nigger mixed up in that game in Aunt Henry's?"

Boojum's knees began to knock. "N—nawsuh! Dey was fo' big strappin' niggers frum N'Leans!"

The Sheriff turned back to Potluck. "Have you found your tongue yet?"

POTLUCK had, for the voice of Boojum had fallen like a benediction on his tormented soul.

"Cap'n, Ah—h jes' tryin' tuh git mah brea'f! Dis is Potluck Hewitt, Cap'n Roane's nigger. Ef he was heah now—!"

"Never mind about Todd Roane!" broke in the Sheriff; "I want to know what you mean by—!"

"Cap'n, Ah's comin' tuh dat fas' ez Ah kin! You see, Cap'n, dis gemmen,"—he turned to miserable Mr. Womble—"dis gemmen 'gaged me dis maw'nin' tuh weah one o' his suits—one o' dem \$27.98 kind—all 'bout town, wif er sign awn mah back, tellin' folks 'bout hit."

Womble nodded confirmation.

"Yassuh, Ah stahtid off strollin' 'bout town tryin' tuh advuhtize dis gemmen's

goods, whin Ah run slap 'g'inst dis heah howdy-do goin' awn 'mongst de Galilean Fishermens. Seein' ez how dey wuz g'wine be a jam down tuh de station, Ah wint dyah so's Ah could advuhtize dis gemmen's suits.

"Well, Cap'n, whin dem delicuts frum N'Leans roll in awn de Memphus Mail, dey sot eyes awn dis heah outfit." He held up the armful of clothes clasped against his striped chest. "No soonuh dey see 'em dey mek' up dere min's dey 'bleeged tuh git dese things.

"Says one o' dem tuh me, 'Nigger, how much you tek' fuh dat outfit—jes' lak' she is?'"

"'Ah cyarn't sell hit,' Ah say. 'Doan' you see dis sign awn mah back? You kin buy sech a fine suit from Misto Womble up Main Street fuh \$27.98. Ennyhow, dis suit doan' b'lawng tuh me, so how kin Ah sell hit!'"

"But dat didn't satisfy dem a-tall. One o' dem say, 'Nigger, le's step 'cross tuh A'nt Henry's en hev' er li'le snack—awn me.'"

"Dat soun' reason'ble, Cap'n, 'spec'lly since dey wuz visitin' delicuts. So 'cross tuh A'nt Henry's we lit out. When we got dyah de place wuz full o' dem delicuts gamin'—why, Cap'n! sech a gamin' you nevuh see!"

"'Lemme out'n dis place!' Ah say. Cap'n, Ah was gettin' franticuh eve'y sec-on'. 'Lemme out!' Ah say; 'tis 'g'inst de law tuh game in dis town en' Sheruff Cartuh ain' gw'ine stan' fuh hit! You N'Leans niggers think you kin drap down tuh dis town en' cut up lak' you please! Lemme out'n heah 'fo' Ah goes straight tuh Sheruff Cartuh en' has dis stopped me-jutly!'"

"Cap'n, den hit happ'n. De delicuts whut led me ovuh dyah grab holt o' me. Two mo' riz up frum de gamin' en' grab holt. 'Fo' you could say John Ketch, dey dun ju'ked all de clo's off mah back, slap down tuh mah socks! Dee wuz so fascinated by dese clo's dey couldn't wait till dey got tuh dis sto' tuh buy some!"

"En' dat," said Potluck, "is 'bout all. 'Cep' jes' ez dey snatch off mah clo's, somebody holluh, 'Sheruff Cartuh comin'!' Den, Cap'n, dey sho' do some scramblin'! Out'n winduhs, do's en' unduh tables dey div'. Dat wuz mah chance!"

"So Ah grabbed all dis outfit en' out Ah lit. Ah knowed soon's Ah 'splained dis tuh Sheruff Cartuh eve'ything would be

onduhstood. Sheruff, Ah sho do 'pologize fuh mekin' sech er sight right on de white folks streets, but Ah jes *had tuh* p'tec' dis gemmen's goods!"

Carter turned in disgust to the mob. "Everybody out!" he shouted, waving his arm and climbing down from the table. "No arrests!"

In shuffling, perspiring, chuckling medley, the crowd dispersed.

HALF an hour later the streets were silent under the merciless pelting of a mid-afternoon sun. Potluck Hewitt sauntered slowly up the street, in the opposite direction from Aunt Henrietta's. Once more he was attired in the same grand outfit, but minus the sign on his back.

The clothes were his to keep, so was the five-dollar bill in his pocket. And two blocks farther, lanky Boojum strolled contentedly on his way. For in his pocket was the long-sought five. Also the dollar the Black Diamond had tendered him for a suit of overalls. Jubilant Womble had settled with Potluck Hewitt with the outfit and ten dollars, and considered the bargain a good one. And Boojum had been right on hand when the deal was closed.

Now in Mr. Womble's store sat Blundon, facing the smiling proprietor.

"How many orders have you taken since that mob scene?" queried the advertisement hound.

"Five," grinned Womble.

"Five," repeated Blundon. "That's just a starter. The crowd's hot now and you mustn't let it grow cold. Now look here, there's a bully front-page story coming out in the morning about this affair today. It's straight, live news, and one of the boys is writing it now. That's *free* advertising, Womble! But here"—he slipped some moist prints from an envelope—"here are photographs of that crowd jamming the street and fighting to get into your store. In every one your sign sticks out like a house afire. Now, Womble, you let me run that full-page ad for a week and we'll run this big picture on the front page in the morning right above the story of what happened today. Man, it's the chance of a life time!"

Mr. Womble looked at those photographs.

"Make it two weeks," he said.

And Blundon dashed from the shop like a frightened fawn.



The Debts of Arizutah

The financial adventure of Sundown Slim and the big bill.

By CLEM YORE

UPON Englishman Creek, lonely in jack-pine, lay the low-pitched cabin of Sundown Slim. Westward the desert spread, a flat, burnished and tantalizing thing, while to the east, on the edge of Steamboat Mountain, the lazzarone village of Arizutah stretched and spurtled its habitations upon and among the red sand-stone arroyas and swales. Arizutah was the domicile of the law and counted as its citizenry exactly forty-five he-votes—heads of families as well as unattached and unattachable male-gentry.

From a distance, the county-seat appeared, jaundiced, trifling, stifled and destitute of existence like the tarantula in his nest. A few distant and jealous towns alleged the worst of it, but the essence of truth was that the settlement bore itself loftily in a region where motion was limited to wind action; where nothing but ravens flew high; where turtle-doves and blue-quail were the sole *genera* of bird life, except stray larks, indigenous to mesquite

and piñon-pine. Arizutah was known afar; her sun-dried men were considered worth considering. The little town seemed to sleep; to be always in a slithering stupor of snakelike coma, which appearance was not truth, as evidenced in the defense by a citizen of note in these words: "Arizutah may show signs of lazy-liver, but boys, take it from me, this burg is *particeps criminis et dramatis personæ*, which is Latin for "the place is kicky for speed and has hankerings for greatness."

Its pioneers had come from Mississippi, Alabama, Missouri and Texas. Once there, they became enchanted, and there they remained, obeying the law of the Painted Desert, the code of the colored sands.

Witchery is in the air; the nights are brilliant tapestries woven with star-cloth and shaded with dawn hues of lilac. Arizutah was kind to the State Government; it allowed the Governor uninterrupted sway, and true though it was that the village paid no attention to official edicts

or taxes, sent no emissaries to the capitol, yet in verity it must be known it made no demands on the higher commonwealth and was content to be let alone—"a part of these United States."

Robert E. Lee's portrait with those of Stonewall Jackson, Pelham, Wade Hampton, Pickett and Jeff Davis hung in various homes, and with sublime faith, the Yankee General Crook's face gleamed from a clipped page of an old magazine that was pasted in a conspicuous spot in the San Pedros House. They did not think much of General Miles, and gave Tom Horn all the credit for the capture of Geronimo; and when Tom was hanged, in Cheyenne, for killing the son of a sheepman, they erected a slab sacred to his memory. Because Sundown Slim had once invoked the anger of General Wilcox for pursuing and dragging back to town by the heels some five horse thieves, Arizutah had a warm spot in its sentimental core for the lonely man who lived upon its outposts.

ON the day of which I write—an average desert day—Sundown Slim had been dreaming the morning away before his cook-stove, listening to the gurgling song of a giant copper-boiler. And as he listened, he dreamed of gone days, of distant signal fires flashing across from range to range, of Apaches on the war path, of long journeys made into Sonora, of great clouds of dust that rolled across the sands, kicked up by the horses he and others were bringing back out of the Mexican country. Occasionally he made rapid trips to the outside, carrying a wet blanket from which steam arose, and with which he performed dazzling and confusing functions much to the amazement of three gentlemen who lay prone on the hog-back behind his home.

The cabin was hot, though its temperature was but a few degrees in excess of that of the surrounding landscape, the only difference being that the desert heat was dry, while that of the cabin was moist, pungent and strange.

Toward noon the three men—one of whom was Sheriff Hackamore Purdy—unable to fathom the eerie actions of Slim, arose from the cramps of their positions and strolled with infinite quietude to the cabin door from whence issued that queer pungent odor.

Looking in they stood, with mouths agape, gazing upon Sundown, who sat cross-legged before the stove softly singing.

My ole cayuse is a tempermental cuss

An' sech he's bound-to be.

My ole cayuse is a tempermental cuss

Fo' he'll go days nary makin' of a fuss

But bust he must fo' to show he's treach-
erous

An' th' feller what knows it's who—
WHY—

—that selfsame feller's me.

The three forms in the doorway lessened the light in the room and Slim, casually casting a glance in the direction of the door, said, with no hesitation, as he recognized the Sheriff: "Come right in, Hackamore, but keep still an' let me get this next batch off accordin' to Hoyle."

Purdy and his deputies distributed themselves on chairs around the room. They immediately discovered the meaning of Sundown's strange pilgrimages with the wet blanket. After due examination the Sheriff opened conversation in his musical drawl.

"I'm holdin' that there's clever."

"I'm right proud of it myself," answered Sundown Slim. "Jest nacherly figured her out by my lonesome, an' she sure do work."

"Do it kick when its prime?" There was urging in Purdy's voice.

"It's persuadin'," replied Slim.

"An' th' taste? Sorta pleasin', I reckon—?"

"Doggone!" Slim arose quickly. "If I aint gettin' worse an' old at th' same time. You boys been in my cabin most two minutes an' I aint offered you nuthin' but chairs."

From a shelf above the stove he took down a gallon glass jug and poured a horse-taming drink into three goblets, which he passed to his guests.

He stood off, with the smile of a master, awaiting the commendation of his genius.

After the libation Hackamore spoke. "Smooth as pin feathers on a goslin," he opined.

"Gentle goin' down as cream," added Jay Cairns, the undersheriff.

"But, oh mamma!" exploded Al Boyce, chief deputy, "how it stimulates when it bumps the digestion! It's got system, I'll say."

"There's sho' enuff velvet, aint they?" smiled Slim.

"Plush," said Cairns.

"Bouquet is hard to get, just right, on home-made hooch," triumphed Sundown.

"Man, you wasted a lot of yo' life," smacked Hackamore; "now if, instead—"

"I was jest thinkin' th' same thing when y'u boys pussy-footed up on me. If I'd a had this line of merchandise back in '81, I'd 'a' owned both Territories an' th' Pan-handle too, an' my brand would 'a' been runnin' loose on ev'ry bunch of hills from Rainbow Bridge t' th' Rio Grande."

"An' then some," agreed Hackamore. "It's disgustin' to think of th' law impedin' sech work as yo's."

"Well," Slim grew mellow, "the fine arts has always paid a price to law."

"That's so," Hackamore said eloquently. "I was a-readin' about this here duck Pasteur, who discovered germs, why, do you know they arrested him five times an' fined him fo' practisin' medicine without a license?"

"If it wasn't fo' martyrs we'd all be climbin' trees yet," said Cairns.

"Don't you boys feel none about takin' me down; why, I'm proud th' law's goin' to punish me fo' my achievement. Why I—"

"Don't you think we'll be fool enuff to spill this secret. No sah, this here art lives an' dies right whar she is. Th' court'll see to that. Th' law is th' same now as when Shakespeare writ them immortal words, 'To do a great right do a leetle wrong an' maybe some mo'.'"

"Well, now, Hackamore, that's th' right kind of justice."

"Get a shuffle on, Slim, we wants to get back to town. I'm wild fo' to hear th' Judge gargle some of this. How much of this mule have you got?"

"Close to twenty-three gallon."

"Shucks, we can't pack all that?"

"When I finish this I'll have nearer thirty."

"Alright, complete her, an' we'll high-tail it to town with two gallon."

Slim, unmindful of the absorbed attention and diligent study of the posse, unwound a double strand of baling-wire from the thick white blanket that covered the boiling mash. With a swing he jerked the blanket from the boiler, rushed outside, and held it gingerly over the wash tub.

"Hey, Al," he shouted at the cabin, "help me handle this dern thing."

With the assistance of the undersheriff, the blanket was fed through a clothes wringer and when the transaction was finished, more than two gallons of a white corn-whisky had dripped into the galvanized tub.

The process was most simple. After the

preparation of the mash, it had been boiled until a light vapor arose. At this point the blanket was stretched over the boiler and allowed to remain until the absorbed and condensed steam sagged its middle, when the wringer would be employed.

The Sheriff's office had long known that Sundown was producing an exquisite beverage. Rumor had named it "Sundown Slim's Elixir." Several times had the officials been permitted to taste it, but though they had searched his home in his absence they had found no evidence of a still. Often they had watched his cabin, but finding him, as they thought, engaged in the laudable act of washing clothes, they had never intruded upon him. Now they were astounded at the simple revelation of his cunning.

"It's as easy to make," cried Hackamore, "as it is to take."

It was not so much to the Sheriff that he had ferreted out a breach of the law, as it was that he had learned the secret which had so baffled all Kane County.

Now the universe had suddenly taken on a newer beauty and in the white light of the desert the colors of the rainbow began to appear.

After the batch was complete, the cabin was locked and the four men rode down the hill side. Though a nominal prisoner, Slim was treated with the utmost solicitude.

IT was three miles to Arizutah and on the road traveled many were the halts made and healths drunk to the distiller of the ambrosial liquor, so that when the town was reached the evidence had diminished in quantity exactly fifty per cent. The County Judge and Attorney were located by the undersheriff and presently the wheels to the chariot of the law and justice were set in motion.

The testimony in the case of *The People vs. Sundown Slim* was brief. It was not heard and weighed, it was poured and tasted, estimated, compared and, finally, commended. The County Attorney thereafter arose and addressed the court.

"If it please your honor, on behalf of the people I rest here," he said.

"Your evidence is all in?"

"Complete."

"Has the defendant anything in rebuttal to offer?" the Court inquired.

"I had," replied Slim, "but Hackamore wouldn't let me bring it along."

The Court leaned confidently toward the defendant. "Then I will pass sentence *instante*, the same, being a vulgarism of the law, meaning, in Latin parlance, *pronto*."

Here Hackamore nudged Slim and whispered: "Stand up an' take off yo' Stetson, it's co't etiquette."

"The sentence of this here Court is—how much of that lick is yet upon the premises of this defendant, Mr. Sheriff?"

"Right close to twenty-five gallons, yo' honor."

"That being an agreed statement of fact— It is a fact, aint it, Slim?"

"Maybe nearer thuty," chanced Sundown.

"Much better. Then hear me: This Court orders that you hie back hence from whence you came and fetch that lick here. How long will it take you?"

"Forty minutes would be wastin' time."

"Well enough; the Court will wait. Further, that you will pay, as a matter of public policy, the sum of one hundred dollars as a fine. Have you got a hundred?"

"Huh?"

"I see you are impoverished; the Court will therefore apply the ancient common law. I will furnish you with forty dollars. You will depart at sunrise, proceed to Squaw Creek, engage in faro and with your winnings pay the fine. After returning to me the stake you will divide equally between yourself and me the residue or remainder. Is the sentence clear?"

"Illuminatin'."

"Failing in either of these two premises, you shall spend six months on the county rock-pile, making big ones into little ones, that our highways may not languish in decay but flourish in splendor. Mr. Sheriff, the defendant is at liberty on his own recognizance. You will escort him to my chambers where instructions will be issued as to the ultimate disposition of the contraband evidence, when the said exhibits shall have been brought within the immediate jurisdiction of this Court. It is needless to add that I shall deem it a contempt of Court if any of this proceeding becomes a subject of popular discussion. Mr. Bailiff, Court is dismissed."

Slim, in a borrowed buckboard, made the journey to his cabin and back in thirty-five minutes. The sentence of the Court was adjudged satisfied with the one exception that for record purposes he gave a personal note, pending his trip to Squaw

Creek, for the four days of County Fair, in lieu of an entry of suspended judgment.

UPON the morrow's dawn Sundown Slim could have been seen leisurely riding across Salt Flats toward the low-lying hills which sheltered the delectable town of Squaw Creek. In his heart of hearts there was June, and never sang the larks so sweetly, nor cooed the turtle doves so passionately, nor bloomed the desert flowers so riotously, nor smelled the sage so fresh, as when Sundown rode his calico-pony on his annual hegira to out-faro the rival town.

This day he whistled and smiled and felt with keen delight the first soft zephyr of the day whiffing through the desert's brush and blowing before it the clumsy tumble-weed.

Small spirals of dust arose beneath his pony's feet, ascending high into the air, over the dew-wet sagebrush, and these moving columns could be seen long after horse and rider had become a part of the emerald maze of the shimmering and distant horizon.

A VOICE called melodiously, coaxingly, and insistently across the bedlam-day:

"Boys, boys; the old army game. Look over here; look, look! The hand is quicker'n the eye and then some—only more so! Thirty to one, if—note the little word—*if*—you spot the pea. Thirty to one! The delight of the ages! A four-square game for men. Not allowed in Kansas, where they never take a chance, but great for long-time husbands and benedicks and wild sport for bachelors. The hand is quicker'n the eye! Look, boys, look—over here!"

It was Hell-for-Leather Luke who bally-hooed the throng, a shell-man from El Paso, renowned from grass to grass, all over the Southwest.

It was the last day of the fair.

They were getting the cow-girls' relay-race ready and after that the folks would scatter and Squaw Creek slip back to another twelve months of unbroken ennui.

Just at the moment, however, it was that border-land that lies between vision and revision; between reminiscence and actuality. Soon all would be memory, even the voice of the manipulator of shells.

Around Luke stood the élite of the countryside. Afar, the prize cattle and hogs

mingled voices in protest against the narrow confines of the exhibition pens. A merry-go-round whirled alkali into the air, its shrieking piano snipping the dusty sunshine with discordant strains from Sousa's "Manhattan Beach." Bunting and pennants were streaming and blazing in the garish light; flivvers groaned in reverse, as they backed here and there; ponies wind-sucked hitching racks and tie-poles; men champed guber-peas; women dug sandwiches from paper parcels and appeased teasing children; eyes flitted from group to group alert for some last strange incident—regretful of the passing moments; young women in colorful plush hats, miniature cow-boys' boots with fantastically stitched tops, scarlet waists and multi-colored neckerchiefs sprayed the scene with splashes of green and brown and red and purple. These were the cow-girls, who soon would ride a five-mile relay-race, changing ponies and saddles at the end of each mile, without assistance. This was the big event of the meet.

Amid the crowd around Hell-for-Leather Luke stood Sundown Slim. Slim had been four hundred dollars ahead at faro, at midnight of the first day, but he had dallied away too long. Three dollars and thirty-five cents was now the sum of his roll and this he tightly clutched within a hand jammed in a pocket of his *chaparejos*. He was awaiting the propitious moment, the psychic urge. Betters were few about the velvet-topped board, though Luke urged and beguiled in unctuous appeal.

SLIM at last received his inspiration; the impulse reached him. He trembled and shivered in the hot air. Backing out of the crowd he ran to Sam Garvan's General Store, where he purchased a bottle of mucilage and drew the cork. On the return to the shell-game he inserted a finger and thumb in the mucky contents of the bottle and threw away the container. Edging his way to the stand he picked up a shell and turned it over as though seeking for some design of deceit, some hidden appliance within. Then with his gummy digits he raised the ball, and rolled it in the mucilage, dropping it without comment to the cloth and placing the shell over it.

"Shake her up, old-timer," he commanded. "I'm sure goin' to tear into you." Luke carelessly mixed the tiny engines of his trade, deftly, delicately and with eye-

charming cunning; never for a minute dropping his eyes to the board, but sweeping the crowd in apparent interest. At last the niggardly ball was allowed to lurk, fully exposed, beneath the side of a shell. It appeared like fatal negligence.

All was done quickly, casually.

Again the burden of the shell-song as, with thumb held under chin and palm cupped, Luke's luring words were shot against his hand over the heads of bystanders into the moving throng:

"Boys—the petite pea-desert croquet! I'm rarin' to ride! Thirty to one! The last game. Look—over here! A child can savvy this. Feed the babies, friends; dresses and jewels for the wife!"

"I'll say th' hand is some speedy," agreed Slim, "but I plays a hunch."

"Many are that a-way," sugared the shell-man. "I've seen the best that is, on the Rio Grande, go broke in ten minutes playing with old Mex women. The hand is quicker'n the eye, but the true hunch is supreme."

An English goat-raiser beside Slim, excited at the turn of the game, sang the words to a ballad of his youth:

Workman? Workman? What are you doing,
Here in the heart of London town?
In a deep-toned voice the digger replied,
"Oh? we're layin' th' gas pipe down."

"My hunch depends right smart, on lookin' th' other feller in th' eye," suggested Slim.

He was talking for time, during which, in the heated and drying air, the mucilage would harden and the ball lose its essential quality to jump on pressure or perhaps to adhere to shell or table; then the hand should fail and the eye conquer.

"I'm looking right at you," said Luke. "If you don't care to watch my hands I'm not a-coaxing you any. Place your bet!"

Slim laid his three-thirty-five upon the cloth just as the expert made the shells move. Mastery was attempted but the mucilage was omnipotent. The ball should have jumped to a small ridge in the top of its shell and a substitute drop to the cloth, from a similar spot in another shell.

Alas! two balls rested upon the cloth.

"That's her!" cried Sundown, placing his finger on a shell.

"But my friend the little pea is here," said Luke, uncovering a ball away from Slim's finger.

"It may be a pea," Slim imitated the tone of Luke, "but not *the* pea: here's *my* pea lookin' right at me."

He raised the shell and there lay the tiny ball glistening in its sticky coat.

"Bo," continued Slim, "count out my money. Standin' in this sun hurts my complexion."

The crowd laughed, but Hell-for-Leather Luke was equal to the situation. He fumbled in a waist-band pocket of his trousers and brought forth a one-hundred-dollar bill.

"One hundred chili peppers; that ole hunch sure rode me ragged," he declared. "Boys, my fingers slipped."

"You means my hunch stuck," replied Sundown, as with bill in hand he backed out of the crowd.

When the moon arose, Sundown was riding through the cacti shadows on the outskirts of Arizutah.

EARLY the following morning he sauntered toward the court-house, where on the flagging walk he encountered Cushion-Foot Dan Byrd, who was packing the scalps of eight mountain-lions and several bob-cats and coyotes over his shoulder.

"Howdy, Cushion-Foot," hailed Sundown.

"Hello, Slim," replied Byrd.

"Whatcha goin' to do with th' scalps?"

"Trade 'em fo' script. Got a hundred in bounty comin' with these."

"Script's only worth sixty-cents on th' dollar right now."

"That's better'n breakin' a laig."

"I got a fine to pay."

"How much?"

"A hundred."

"How come you think I'm interested?"

"When I pays my fine, you slaps down yo' script an' demands cash."

"Man, you oughta be in Washington."

"You follow me? Get yo' script an' wait in th' hall; when you is ready, we go."

"I'm treadin' on yo' feet. Shake a laig!"

"An' when you gets that cash, I'll be waitin' fo' jest one hundred berries fo' them hawgs you bought last spring!"

A few minutes later Slim issued from the County Clerk's office. He had paid his fine. Byrd slipped past him, a wink in his eye. Slim lingered with ear cocked at the door.

He heard the clerk speaking to Byrd.

"Can't be done. Bounty money in special fund. All exhausted. Court money goes into general fund—unavailable for script use."

"But listen here, now—" and Cushion-Foot told a tale to the deputy clerk, which Slim did not catch. The tale brought out the hundred-dollar bill, which went at once into the waiting hand of Slim. Sundown was about to walk down the steps when the deputy-clerk caught his eye and, approaching him, said: "How about that hundred you been owing me for water-rights on my ditch, Slim?"

"I got you; here you are," said Sundown. "He's cute too," indicating Byrd.

The deputy did not stop to parley. He ran down the steps to intercept Jim Stalton and to pay him a hundred as part payment for alfalfa sold to the deputy's ranch. By this time Slim had seated himself under the awning in front of the San Pedros House, from where he saw Jim Stalton walk into the boarding-house of Mrs. Holton, and Sundown knew at once that Jim was washing and wiping away a long standing board-bill.

The flea-like actions of that one-hundred-dollar bill now completely absorbed Slim. He feverishly fastened his eyes on the boarding-house door, after Jim came out, and was soon rewarded by the sight of Mrs. Holton, without bonnet or mantilla, an uncommon thing for her, rushing from her porch across to the Feed Store of Fred Tully to pay the hundred on account for chickens, eggs, milk and butter.

As she returned she smiled at Slim.

"Come in, Slim, and have dinner on me; I'm that happy I could cry."

Slim did not respond, for he saw Fred Tully rushing across the street to pay Warren Rutledge and even now Warren was shouting after Sid Williams, who was passing on a wagon.

Sid Williams jerked his team into a trot and, keen on the scent of a creditor, drove around the corner where he paid Ferd Buckhorn an implement bill. Slim was right behind him and saw the transaction. From Center Street and San Juan Avenue one could sweep the town, square and streets alike. Here Sundown Slim took up his vigil.

Whistling and singing were heard all along the trail of the note. Good humor was upon every side.

Slim had counted the number of times

the bill changed hands. It went from store to street and from street to store; left the square for the residence section and came back speedily to another store. Some men got hold of it several times, only to turn it into other hands. On it went. Noon came; early afternoon. Slim held to his post. He forgot hunger, thirst, heat, everything, but the homing actions of the money. Middle afternoon approached and Sundown saw the bill going into the desert via the chap pocket of Old Man Lawson, but Lige Peters cut across the street, at Slim's suggestion, and the bill flapped into his hand. Lige carried it back to the square and once more it changed hands in a semicircle of men. Slim's eyes were protruding.

"Doggone, but Bryan was right," he mused. "One-hundred-and-thirty-two."

There it was, into fresh hands again.

"One-hundred-and-thirty-three," whispered Sundown.

ERNEST HOWIE walked into view and slanted across the square, toward the spot where the bill was working. It had just become the property of Gus Barlow. Blam! Something snapped in the consciousness of Slim. Howie owed him. There was something, somehow, about the way Gus started as he saw Ernest that suggested to Slim that the bill would soon be transferred to Howie. In remarkably short time Sundown was at Barlow's side when he paid his debt.

"Drap it in my hand, Ernie," laughed Sundown; "that haulin' I done fo' you is about due and payable."

"Oh, rats," said Howie, "money an' me don't wear well, but I'm a-bettin' my wife'll sure give me hell when she hears of this."

Slim headed straight for the White Elephant, where he knew the County Judge was playing Coeur d'Alene Solo.

As he passed the roulette layout a great idea came to him. He saw red for an instant and this was his idea of a hunch. What if he could change the bill into two of its kind? Without estimate he laid it on the red.

The ball whipped in its groove. It tumbled and fell and bounced and settled at last. Red it was and Slim was counting gold when the little ball spun once more. But he had had enough thrills for one day. He sought the Judge and gave into his hand the golden winnings. The lone bill

he tucked in his pocket and sought the stable and his pinto.

THAT night as he sat before his fireplace, the greasewood logs crackling merrily, for the desert nights are chill indeed, the *yi-yi-yipping* of coyotes came to his ears as a surcease to the doubts and fears of the day. The dancing flames still held for his eyes the leaping of a lone bill; the figures in the fire were old debts being wiped away.

From the shadows of the mesquite a wraithlike figure approached the open door of Slim's cabin. An instant later Sundown looked into the muzzle of a six-gun.

"Why, hello, Luke," he said. "Sit down."

"Put up them paws," said Hell-for-Leather Luke.

Slim's hands ascended obediently.

"Now—where's that hundred-case note?"

"In th' Java-can, on that there shelf," Sundown indicated with a nod.

Luke secured the bill and Slim found sufficient voice to say: "You found out about it, did you? Wasn't it cute?"

"Shut your trap," snapped Luke, as he pulled up a money belt and picked five twenty-dollar gold-pieces from it. These he laid on the table and smiled as he said to Slim: "Put down your hands; you'll get a cramp. There's an even exchange, Sundown."

Slim gazed at the gold.

"What's this fo'?" he asked.

"That dern bill," replied Luke. "I've been laying out in the chaparral waiting for you to come home since last night. I was sure skeered you'd pass it on somebody."

He walked to the fire and tossed the note amid the blazing embers.

"It was a counterfeit," he remarked.

"A counter-*what*?" cried Slim. "Sit down, Luke, and let's have a smoke."

"I'm wild for sleep," Luke yawned, "and I know bunking with a man is like sleeping with a skinned horse, but if you don't mind I'd like to hit the hay."

"Crawl in; I sleep on th' outside," Sundown answered absently.

Luke crept into bed. Sundown smoked on and smiled into the fire. At last he, too, sought the covers and as he laid his boots upon the floor, he murmured:

"Don't that beat hell?"



The Birmingham God

*Another story of the ingenious
'Orace and his fellow-rapscallions.*

By F. MORTON HOWARD

MR. HORACE DOBB sharply closed the tattered volume which had been occupying his leisure, and looked up as if something were momentarily dazzling him. And next he removed his slippered feet from the mantel and very slowly and carefully described an arc with his heels until he was sitting erect in his chair, alertly yet contemplatively, and also with a suggestion of breathlessness, in the manner of one who is visited by an inspired idea.

For a full minute Mr. Dobb remained thus, and then he rose and shuffled out into his shop. Here he opened a cupboard to take from it a small metallic object; returning to his parlor, he placed this object on the table, and it stood revealed as a posturing figure of tarnished brass, ostensibly Oriental in origin.

And now for a long, long while Mr. Dobb stared at this figure in deep meditation, with his eyelids twitching and flickering impatiently when, now and then, he found that his inventiveness had stampeded him into some mental *cul-de-sac*. And then he began to pace the narrow confines of the room, walking in a tense, rigid way, as

though his thoughts were so delicately balanced on each other that the slightest disturbance of their equilibrium would send them scattering uselessly in all directions.

But at last he halted, nodded his head with great satisfaction at the idol on the table, and then came to the greatest animation, whistling, snapping his fingers, and even pirouetting a little.

"Green hey'es and all, just like it says in the book," he remarked, enigmatically.

And with that he bundled the idol back into its cupboard, and set forth to confer with Mr. Peter Lock at his place of employment.

The hour happily being that unusually devoted to a recess, Mr. Dobb found Mr. Lock quite alone at his post in the billiard-room at the Royal William Hotel. Mr. Dobb at once put to Mr. Lock a direct question.

"Well, I don't know," murmured Mr. Lock, reflectively. "There's two or three of 'em. 'Specially at billiards. But, on the whole, I should say that Sinnett is. Come to think of it, I'm pretty certain he is. I don't know where you'd find a bigger, anyway."

"Ah, but does 'e think 'e's smart?" asked Mr. Dobb. "That's the kind of mug I'm after."

"He's the sort what's so busy thinking about his cleverness," replied Mr. Lock, "that he don't have a moment to spare for finding out what a fool he really is."

"That's the sort what's good for trade," declared Mr. Dobb, appreciatively. "'E's just the kind of chap I'm needing."

"What's the game this time?" asked Mr. Lock.

"Hidols' heyes," said Mr. Dobb. "I been reading a book," he continued in response to Mr. Lock's uncomprehending stare. "And there was a hidol in it what 'ad real hemerald heyes, and this 'ere idol was stole from a foreign temple somewhere by a couple of chaps what didn't know about its heyes, and there was a lot of murders and things in it."

"Why, that's a old, old plot," said Mr. Lock, disparagingly. "You're losing your dash, 'Orace. Fancy *you* having to go to books to learn anything!"

"P'r'aps it'll be a noo enough plot so far as this 'ere Mr. Sinnett is concerned," observed Mr. Dobb, unruffled.

He tarried some while longer in intimate discussion with Mr. Lock, and then departed to interview another member of the translated crew of the obsolete *Jane Gladys*, in the plump and venerable person of Mr. Samuel Clark, the ferryman.

Mr. Clark, perceiving the advent of Mr. Dobb, came forward to greet him with marked expectancy.

"Sam, do you know a chap called Sinnett—Mr. George Sinnett?" queried Mr. Dobb.

"Squeaky voice, nose like a fox?" sketched Mr. Clark.

"That's 'im."

"Know 'im? I 'ate 'im!" stated Mr. Clark.

"Just as well," sagely remarked Mr. Dobb. "Nothing like a bit of feeling to make a man sincere in his hefforts."

"Meaning—"

"Why, this 'ere Sinnett is the next down on our list, Sam," announced Mr. Dobb. "'E's down for a Hindian hidol—fifteen pounds."

"And us?" quickly asked Mr. Clark.

"'Alf of it between the three of you," promised the master-mind of the confederacy. "I can hafford to be generous. It only cost me three-and-six."

"Imitation?" next inquired Mr. Clark.

"Oh, no," denied Mr. Dobb, flipantly. "Real native Hindian work—that's why I give such a 'igh price for it."

"And Sinnett's going to pay fifteen quid for it?" raptly cried Mr. Clark. "Oh, 'appy day! A dozen times 'ave I ferried 'im across, and never so much as a 'apenny for a tip! And then 'e 'ad the nerve to say that the fare ought to be less at low tide, because the distance aint so far!"

"Never mind," said Mr. Dobb, "everything comes to 'im 'oo dont mind laying low for a bit. What's 'is 'ouse of call, do you know?"

"The Flag and Pennant yonder, when 'e aint trying to play billiards at the Royal William."

"Another thing," mentioned Mr. Dobb. "'Ave you got any old scars or wounds on you?"

"There's this old cut on the back of my 'and, what I done that night I was shaving in the fo'c'sle when Alf Runnett come down and tickled me, playful, because 'is gal 'ad gone off with some one else."

"Just right," said Mr. Dobb, examining the cicatrice; and forthwith adopted a preceptory attitude towards the ferryman.

Mr. Clark, at the end of ten minutes of instruction, asked a few questions to dispel one or two uncertainties of mind, and then professed a complete trust in his ability to carry out Mr. Dobb's directions. Mr. Dobb, after satisfying himself by something in the nature of a rehearsal that Mr. Clark's confidence was well founded, then passed on for the purpose of seeking an interview of connective interest with Mr. Joseph Tridge, fourth member of the confederacy established long ago in the bowels of the inglorious *Jane Gladys*.

THAT same evening Mr. George Sinnett was taking his ease in the bar of the Flag and Pennant when Mr. Clark entered a little precipitously and flung himself into a chair beside Mr. Sinnett.

"Never mind!" passionately remarked Mr. Clark. "I'll get me rights yet! Fair's fair, aint it, Sinnett?"

Mr. Sinnett turned and regarded the ferryman with considerable coldness, for Mr. Clark was presumptuously flinging a bridge across a well-defined social space. Mr. Sinnett, noting that the ferryman was a little glassy of orb and rather reckless about the disposition of his legs, frowned unencouragingly and looked away again.

"Fair's fair!" again asserted Mr. Clark,

dogmatically. "'Im and me was both in it, and that's what I got for a start-off! Look!"

Mr. Sinnett aloofly disdained the invitation, and next became aware that the back of a huge hand was floating to and fro a few inches below his nose.

"You look at that afore it slips," directed Mr. Clark, forcefully. "See that scar? That's what I got for *my* share."

"Indeed," said Mr. Sinnett, not quite comfortably.

"In-blooming-deed!" asserted Mr. Clark. "Just as I was climbing over the railings of the temple."

"Temple? What temple?" asked Mr. Sinnett, puzzled.

"Ah, I aint such a fool as to tell you that!" vaunted Mr. Clark. "But the nigger on guard gave me a lick across the back of the 'and with 'is sword, and— My chum got away all right, though. At least, 'e was my chum in them days, but *now*—"

Mr. Clark concluded his sentence with a deep-throated snarl, eloquent of hatred, contempt, and smoldering fury.

Mr. Sinnett, for lack of more intelligent comment, sipped at his glass in a non-committal way.

"Ah, it's a sailor's life for fun and hadventure!" cried Mr. Clark; and uttered a few tuneful roulades bearing upon his statement.

"'Ere!" he said, ceasing suddenly to be lyrical and leaning forward to address Mr. Sinnett in a kind of large confidence. "There's people fool enough to think that I'm 'angling about Shore'aven just to work the ferry! They think *that*, they do. Let 'em, says I. So much the better."

"Well, what *are* you doing here?"

Mr. Clark bent a little farther forward.

"'E's 'ere!" he whispered.

"He? Who?"

"Why, the chap I've been telling you about. The chap 'oo 'elped me to steal the hidol out of that sacred temple. Run away with it, 'e did, but I been tracking 'im down all these years, and now I've found 'im! And if he aint got that hidol still—"

"Valuable, is it?" asked Mr. Sinnett, intrigued.

"Can't say. 'Im and me only sneaked it for a lark, only them niggers took it so serious. It don't *look* vallyble, any'ow. Just a fat thing with a fat face and a couple of bits of green glass for heyes. 'Tain't as if it was made of gold, as you

could see at a glance. There wasn't 'alf a outcry when we took it, though. After us, they was, for ever so long, and we 'ad to—to take to the jungle to give 'em the slip. And then, one night while I was asleep, my chum took the hidol out of my pocket and 'ooked off with it."

"And you followed him?" asked Mr. Sinnett, with lively interest.

"Everywhere! Worst of it was, wherever I followed 'im, 'e'd 'ad about a year's start. But at last I've found 'im, and—"

With a species of incredulous annoyance at his own garrulity, Mr. Clark stopped abruptly and rose from his chair.

"You been letting me say more than I ought to!" he remarked, severely.

"Oh, no!" returned Mr. Sinnett smoothly. "Why, you have not even told me the name of—"

"No; and I aint going to, neither!" truculently interrupted Mr. Clark; and marched from the apartment.

"Queer!" murmured Mr. Sinnett. "Very queer!"

A LITTLE later in the evening that gentleman, directing his course homeward by accustomed paths, came to a length of ill-lit thoroughfare, and here he found himself beholding the unusual. For, in the very middle of the roadway, he could clearly discern two men, who grappled earnestly with each other, swaying this way and that in furious embrace, and yet preserving an eerie and almost complete silence.

For some moments, Mr. Sinnett viewed this phenomenon in amazement, and then he hurried forward. His advent appeared to alarm the antagonists, for, as soon as he drew near, they parted. One of them, presenting a stout figure tolerably familiar to Mr. Sinnett, ran clumsily away down the road; the other man, breathing exhaustedly, stood fumbling at his collar in a dazed way. Mr. Sinnett, peering at his features through the gloom, discovered him to be the man who kept the Magnolia Toilet Saloon, one Mr. Joseph Tridge, to wit.

"What's the game?" demanded Mr. Sinnett.

"No game," puffed Mr. Tridge. "Dead serious!"

"Wasn't that the ferryman?"

"Eh?" cried Mr. Tridge, guiltily. "No—oh, no! It wasn't 'im. It wasn't anybody *you'd* know. It—it wasn't anybody *I* know!"

"But I'm certain— Did he attack you sudden? Why didn't you call for the police?"

"We—we'd rather not 'ave the p'lice mixed up with it. It's a—a private affair. I—I'm all right now."

Mr. Tridge then stumbled dizzily against the other man.

"Here—here!" cried Mr. Sinnett, in concern. "Why, man, you're shaking all over! Here, take my arm and lean on me. The Cutlass and Cannon is quite close; you'd better have something there to pull you together."

Mr. Tridge lurched again, most convincingly, and Mr. Sinnett, with many encouraging remarks, began to lead him towards the tavern he had named.

"All the same," muttered Mr. Tridge, hazily, "'e—'e didn't get it."

"Get what?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing! I—I was thinking."

A minute or so after they reached the Cutlass and Cannon. Here Mr. Tridge, with obvious effort, forced himself to a normal deportment, thus escaping the curiosity of the few patrons present. Under direction of Mr. Sinnett, he sat down in a quiet corner, and soon, under the influence of his companion's prescription, became quite animated. A second potion having been swallowed, and a third ordered, Mr. Sinnett coughed delicately and addressed Mr. Tridge in winning accents.

"You were telling me just now, when—when you were taken queer out in the road—that that ferryman didn't get what he was after."

"Did I tell you it was the ferryman? I never meant to."

"Oh, well, you did! But there's no harm done. A secret is a secret with me. Same as I sha'n't tell anyone," continued Mr. Sinnett, watching his companion very closely, "that what he was after was an Indian idol."

MR. TRIDGE started violently.

"Ow did you know *that*?" he asked.

"Why, you told me so yourself. Don't you remember?" returned Mr. Sinnett, with a disarming smile.

"No; I—I don't remember. My 'ead was going round and round, and— Well, I *am* a mug!"

He raised his glass and emptied it. Mr. Sinnett, eyeing him with intensity, immediately had the measure refilled.

"After all," said Mr. Tridge, defensively, "it's as much mine as it 'is!"

"Quite," readily agreed Mr. Sinnett.

"'E tried to serve me a dirty trick," said Mr. Tridge, placing an argumentative forefinger on Mr. Sinnett's necktie, "and I served 'im one instead. See? That's fair, aint it?"

"Certainly," acquiesced Mr. Sinnett, with a straining quality of helpfulness underlying his tone. "Fair is fair, all the world over, of course!"

"'Course it is. And, mind you, I'm hobstinit. If 'e'd come to me, fair and reasonable, in the first place— You see what I mean? But 'e didn't. Same as them nigger chaps what 'ave follered me about from time to time, wanting to buy it back. I told 'em once I wouldn't sell it, and what I says I sticks to. See?"

"Clear as clear. When your mind's made up, it's made up."

"That's me," accepted Mr. Tridge, complacently. "Follered me all over the place, they 'ave, and hofferred me any amount of money for it. But I aint a wobbler. What I says I sticks to. See? Let's 'ave another!"

"Yes, let's," agreed Mr. Sinnett, eagerly.

"Tried to steal it off me, them niggers 'ave," said Mr. Tridge disdainfully after the rites consequent on a further libation had been observed. "But I'm a match for *them* any day. And they talks about sticking me next time they come across me. Let 'em try that on, that's all!"

"But why do you think they are so anxious to get it back? What do they want to—"

"Hidol!" sagely returned Mr. Tridge, with an explanatory wave of his glass. "What they says their prayers to. Sort of—sort of mascot, you know. You know, if you 'ad a mascot and you lost it, 'ow everything 'ud seem to go wrong for *you*? Not that it's brought me much luck."

"Perhaps these riggers you spoke of was at the back of it?" suggested Mr. Sinnett.

"Maybe," said Mr. Tridge, with sublime carelessness. "There was always a nigger around whenever things went wrong, anyway. But I'm a British seaman, I am, and I don't take no notice of niggers. See? And I'm surprised as *you* should, either!"

"I—I wasn't thinking," apologized Mr. Sinnett. "But tell me—do you think perhaps the idol is valuable?"

Mr. Tridge noisily laughed the notion to scorn.

"You ought to *see* it!" he cried. "Just a figger of fun made of brass, with bits of green glass for eyes."

Mr. Sinnett sat vigilantly upright.

"Oh, but are you sure they *are* glass?" he asked.

"Why, what else *could* they be?" returned Mr. Tridge.

"They—they might—" began Mr. Sinnett, and then checked himself. "Er—quite so," he ended, belatedly. "What else *could* they be?"

Mr. Tridge, carelessly flicking the question out of the range of further consideration, now stated that he felt quite recovered from the attack that had been made upon him, and earnestly besought Mr. Sinnett to maintain silence as to the incident, if for no other reason than for the good repute of the Magnolia Toilet Saloon.

"I been wild in my time," confessed Mr. Tridge, "but I don't want folks to think that I'm the rough character I used to be. See? And now good night, and thank 'ee."

"Talk about sheer *luck*!" joyously murmured Mr. Sinnett, as he walked away. "George, my boy, you're on the track of something good! Why, it's like one of them old detective tales come true!"

FOR the ensuing portion of the week, Mr. Sinnett's everyday pursuits suffered neglect, for that worthy had apparently conceived an obsession to have either Mr. Tridge or Mr. Clark continually under observation. And so for each of several mornings he entered the Magnolia Toilet Saloon and sat him down on the bench where those waited who required Mr. Tridge's professional services.

Here Mr. Sinnett would become so engrossed in the newspaper that he would waive his turn for attention till he was the only patron remaining. And, when he had no further pretext for lingering, he would be shaved, and then go off to the ferry, where he would be needlessly rowed across the ferry and return by that conveyance almost immediately.

And in the afternoon he would find that he had need of toilet soap, or a bottle of hair-oil, and he would repair to Mr. Tridge's establishment to procure such article, making the matter of purchase as protracted a business as possible. And then he would saunter down to the ferry and, alleging that sea air was good for him, be taken several consecutive journeys across the river by Mr. Clark.

And in the evening he would visit the Flag and Pennant inn, or such other tavern as might be extending its hospitality to Mr. Tridge or Mr. Clark, and here he would laboriously contrive desultory conversation with one or other of them until doors had to be closed, when his way would strangely coincide with the homeward path of that gentleman of the twain in whose society closing-time had found him.

But never a word was there spoken of an idol of any sort. Twice or thrice Mr. Sinnett had alluded to India in a natural, unforced way. But mention of that empire had instantly caused both Mr. Tridge and Mr. Clark to look suspicious and markedly avoid any development of the subject, so that Mr. Sinnett had to travel warily back, by way of Canada and Australia and New Zealand, to shallower waters.

And, for their part, Mr. Tridge and Mr. Clark bore the partiality of Mr. Sinnett for their society with nothing but a nice air of gratitude for patronage. Not once did either of them make allusion to that recent evening when they had shown him something of the inner side of their confidence. And Mr. Sinnett was glad that this should be so, for clearly, he argued, it showed that the conversations had had no abiding place in their memories. Wherefore, then, he cultivated their company, waiting for a chance word to swell the bulk of his secret information and give him assistance in turning this knowledge to his own profit.

"Ever seen a cat waiting outside a mouse-hole? That's 'im!" Mr. Clark privately reported to Mr. Horace Dobb.

"A bit of waiting don't do no 'arm," said Mr. Dobb, sagaciously. "The more time 'e spends the less 'e'll like to think that it might 'ave been wasted."

So that it was not till one evening in the middle of the following week that Mr. Sinnett was thrilled by a further unwinding of the spool of adventure.

On that night, neither Mr. Clark nor Mr. Tridge were to be discovered in accustomed haunts, and Mr. Sinnett, fearful of this coincidence, went from hostelry to hostelry in feverish search. Returning to the Royal William Hotel for a second time, he again questioned the billiard marker.

"No, Mr. Tridge aint been in here yet, sir," Mr. Lock replied. "In fact, I was just wondering whether you'd come across him anywhere. There's been some one inquiring very eager after him since you was nere a hour ago."

"Who was it—that ferryman?"

"No, sir; a dark gentleman."

"A—a nigger?" exclaimed Mr. Sinnett.

"Well, yes; except that he was dressed quite respectable," acquiesced Mr. Lock. "Oh, very respectable indeed. He looked as if he might be pretty well off at home."

"Did he say he wanted to see Tridge important?"

"Very important, so he said, sir. He said something about only just having managed to find out where he was, and about a boat sailing back almost immediate."

"Um-m-m," commented Mr. Sinnett, and thoughtfully began to stroke his chin. "Did he—did the nigger say where he was stopping, or anything like that?"

"No, sir. I told him where Mr. Tridge lodged, and—"

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that!"

"No, sir? Why not?"

"Oh, because—"

Mr. Sinnett, without furnishing the explanation, stopped short, for Mr. Tridge had just entered the room. Conspicuously bandaged was Mr. Tridge's right hand, and a huge asterisk of sticking-plaster decorated his left cheek.

"Ad a bit of a haccident," he returned, evasively, when Mr. Sinnett asked a surprised question. "Cut meself."

"How?" further inquired Mr. Sinnett.

"With a knife," said Mr. Tridge.

"Whatever was you a-doing of, sir?" asked Mr. Lock.

"What the devil's that got to do with you?" roared Mr. Tridge. "You shut up and mind your own business!"

"Sorry, sir," humbly apologized Mr. Lock. "By the way, sir, there was a dark gent inquiring for you."

"I know," said Mr. Tridge, curtly. "I met 'im!"

AND now the door opened, and the visage of Mr. Clark stared round it. Vengeful and gloating was the stout ferryman's face, and he nodded with malevolent satisfaction at Mr. Tridge.

"Ah, 'e told me 'e 'ad!" he cried. "Good luck to 'im!"

"You get out!" shouted Mr. Tridge, passionately. "Else I'll serve you like I did 'im!"

"Pooh, 'e was only shamming!" retorted Mr. Clark. "'E got up again and walked away soon as you'd gone."

"Well, shut up, anyway!" ordered Mr. Tridge, with a warning scowl. "Don't you

think you've said more than enough already?"

"Then?" said Mr. Clark, glancing carelessly at Mr. Sinnett and Mr. Lock. "They don't know nothing!"

"Oh, well, 'e didn't get it, anyway!" declared Mr. Tridge.

"'E'll get it all right in the end," prophesied Mr. Clark, darkly. "You mightn't get off so lucky next time."

"'E'll never get it," stated Mr. Tridge, with dour confidence.

"Not if you deals fair by me," said Mr. Clark. "Pr'aps he wont, then, not against the two of us."

"I've told you I aint sharing once and for all!" bellowed Mr. Tridge.

"All right!" growled Mr. Clark. "You'll be sorry. I could tell you something if I liked. Made *me* sit up when I 'eard it, anyway. Look 'ere, I give you fair warning—in future it's either to be me and you, or me and 'im! Take your choice. Anyway, after what I've learnt tonight, I'm going to be *in* it, some'ow!"

"Nothing doing!" announced Mr. Tridge, stoutly.

"All right," said Mr. Clark, in the most sinister fashion. "Don't say I didn't warn you!"

He withdrew. Mr. Tridge began to whistle a little flatly, as though unaware of the absorbed gaze bent upon him by the other two men present.

"Reminds me—letter to post!" ejaculated Mr. Sinnett, suddenly; and followed after Mr. Clark, in a state of the keenest excitement.

Mr. Clark had proceeded but as far as the tap-room of the Royal William, and here Mr. Sinnett unostentatiously took up a strategic position in the chair next to him. For some while Mr. Clark displayed an introspective moodiness, sipping at his refreshment and nodding his head with the same grim air of determination.

But presently he turned towards Mr. Sinnett, and, after eyeing him cautiously, addressed him in the gruff tones of one determined to check any unnecessary extension of talk.

"'Ow much is hemeralds worth?" he asked.

"Emeralds?" fluttered Mr. Sinnett. He paused to strive for greater self-control.

"That's what I said," observed Mr. Clark, surlily. "Hemeralds. You know, them green stones."

"It—it depends."

"I see," said Mr. Clark, and pointedly turned his shoulder to Mr. Sinnett.

"How—how big are they?" ventured Mr. Sinnett.

"Both of 'em are a pretty fair size," said Mr. Clark. "But it don't matter. I—I was only just wondering. See?"

He brought his back even more deliberately into Mr. Sinnett's cognizance, and the conversation ended. And, a few minutes after, he quitted the room with so ungenial an air that Mr. Sinnett had not the courage to accompany him. And he found Mr. Tridge was gone from the billiard-room, so that there was nothing left for Mr. Sinnett to do but to retire home to spend a night of fitful slumber.

EARLY next morning did he enter the Magnolia Toilet Saloon, drawn thither by an irresistible desire to keep abreast of every development in this affair which so tantalizingly suggested personal profit without indicating the means thereto.

"Morning, sir!" said Mr. Tridge.

"Morning!" returned Mr. Sinnett. "I just looked in to see how those wounds of yours are getting on."

"Oh, they're all right," said Mr. Tridge; and added, in the casual tones of heroism, "matter of fact, it was a bit of a scrap. And, what's more, I 'ad another one after I left you last evening. Only, of course, I don't want you to talk about 'em. It wout do this 'ere shop no good."

"And—and the second scrap?"

"Ah, that was in my lodgings! When I got 'ome," narrated Mr. Tridge, "I see my window open. Indoors I goes, very quiet. Blest if they wasn't trying to burgle me!"

"Burgle you? Who was?"

"Why, that—oh, just a couple of chaps. I 'it out at 'em, and they closed with me. In the end," concluded Mr. Tridge, modestly, "they was both glad enough to jump out of the window."

"Well, well!" breathed Mr. Sinnett.

Mr. Tridge smiled, and then broke into chuckles.

"It's rather a joke," he said. "I don't mind telling you something, if you promise you wont repeat it."

"Oh, I promise!" cried Mr. Sinnett, readily.

"Well, they was after something that wasn't there at all! Mind you, they *thought* it was! It was something I'd 'ad for a long time, and they was very anxious

to get it. Many and many a try they'd 'ad for it. But I wouldn't let 'em 'ave it. The first scrap last night—that was one of their hattempts. Anyone might think it worth 'undreds of pounds, the way they keeps on trying. But it aint."

"Isn't it?" asked Mr. Sinnett, in strained tones.

"Only as a curiosity. It's vallyble, far as that goes. Anyway, I 'ad no difficulty it getting twelve quid-for it last night."

"You—you've sold it?" cried Mr. Sinnett.

"I 'ave. After that first scrap last night, I got so sick about 'aving to bother about its being safe always that I just took and sold it. Not to *them*, of course. I wouldn't give in to *them*. I sold it to Dobb, in Fore Street. 'E see at once that it was a genuine curiosity, and 'e didn't 'aggle a bit."

For several long seconds Mr. Sinnett stared at Mr. Tridge. Then, with a start, he purchased a superfluous stick of shaving-soap, and wandered from the premises.

Scarce had he gone twenty yards when he found himself accosted by Mr. Peter Lock.

"Just the very gent I was 'oping to see!" said Mr. Peter Lock, exhibiting suppressed excitement. "There's something a bit queer afoot, sir, what I'd like to talk over with you. You know about that row Mr. Tridge 'ad with the ferryman last night. At least, I think it's something to do with that."

"We can talk in here," said Mr. Sinnett; and drew Mr. Lock into the Bunch o' Grapes.

"Mind you, sir, I don't take no responsibility," said Mr. Lock. "But it's queer. That Indian gent come into the billiard-room not half an hour ago. He said he'd arranged to meet Clark, the ferryman, there at noon, but he found he must get back to London by the eleven-eleven train this morning. And so he gave me a note to hand to him."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, he said something about advising Clark to lay low after last night. He said he'd forgot to put that in the note, and asked me to mention it to Clark. Remembered it just as he was going, he did, and come back to tell me. Well, now, sir, I don't want to get mixed up in no fishy cases. If you remember what them two was saying to each other last night—"

"Open the note," directed Mr. Sinnett.

"Just what I was thinking, sir. That's

why I wanted to see you, because you was there and know as much about it as I do. If there's any risk, I don't mean to be in it at all."

"Quite so," said Mr. Sinnett. "Open the note and make sure."

With a certain trembling eagerness, Mr. Sinnett watched Mr. Lock draw an envelope from his pocket.

"You can easily put it in a new envelope," said Mr. Sinnett, as Mr. Lock began to stare perplexedly at the flap.

"I never thought of that," said Mr. Lock, and at once tore open the missive. It was very short.

"I am at 17, Somerset Terrace, Poplar, till tomorrow. Ten my boat sails, but letters there will be forwarded me. Keep to our bargain. Do not forget that I am prepared to pay a higher price than anyone else for it."

"Strange," murmured Mr. Lock.

"Seventeen, Somerset Terrace, Poplar," muttered Mr. Sinnett. "Seventeen, Somer—"

"Do you think there's anything in the address, sir?" asked Mr. Lock, curiously.

"If you take my advice," said Mr. Sinnett, impressively, "you'll burn that note and say no more about it."

"I think that would be safest," agreed Mr. Lock, and, striking a match, ignited the missive in the fireplace.

"Well, I must be going," said Mr. Sinnett, coming to a sudden briskness; and, settling the score, he hastened away.

FIVE minutes later he was in the presence of Mr. Horace Dobb. Permission to glance round the stock had been met with suave and smiling acquiescence, and almost immediately Mr. Sinnett, with false calm, was inquiring the price of a small idol.

"That?" said Mr. Dobb. "Oh, I'd let you have that for twenty pounds. Genuine curiosity, that is, sir. I dare say it's worth a lot more, but I want to make you a customer. Ah, *that* wont be on my shelves long, for all I only bought it last night. Always getting inquiries for genuine foreign idols, I am. That's the only one I've got in my shop at present. There's a lot of connoisseurs of them things about."

"Twenty pounds?" said Mr. Sinnett. "Why, man, I happen to know you only gave twelve for it!"

"Ah, I'd 'ave given more if 'e'd pressed

me, but 'e seemed anxious to get rid of it. And, anyway, sir, I'd 'ave got twenty pounds easy enough for it yesterday afternoon, if I 'ad it. There was a Indian gentleman in 'ere hinquring if by any chance I 'ad any hidols. Particular keen 'e seemed to get one just like that. 'E might 'ave been—"

"Fifteen pounds," offered Mr. Sinnett.

And so it was; but even then, Mr. Dobb only yielded with professed reluctance to losing the chance of Mr. Sinnett as a regular patron thenceforward.

THAT same evening Mr. Clark, Mr. Tridge, and Mr. Lock foregathered in Mr. Dobb's parlor.

"Yes, I see 'im go," said Mr. Tridge. "'E'd got it in a portmanteau. Caught the two-twenty-one, 'e did. 'E'll be in London by now. Can't you fancy 'im getting more and more hexcited at that 'ouse, trying to hexplain to 'em that 'e wants to see a nigger they don't know nothing about? And 'e'll think they're trying to deceive 'im, and 'e'll tell 'em all the 'ole story, just to show 'e's telling the truth, and—"

"Oh, 'e'll be very hagitated," said Mr. Clark. "'E's that sort, I bet, when things goes sideways. Serve 'em right! Anyway, thanks for my share, 'Orace. I shall be able to do a bit of slate-cleaning with it. By the way, what haddress did you send 'im looking for, Peter?"

"Seventeen, Somerset Terrace, Poplar. 'Orace told me to write down any old address I happened to think of, didn't you, 'Orace? And Seventeen, Somerset Terrace, come easiest to my mind. I don't know where I got it from."

"Seventeen, Somerset—" gasped Mr. Tridge and Mr. Clark, simultaneously.

"That's it."

"Then I can tell you where you got it!" shouted Mr. Tridge. "You come and see me and Sam Clark there many a time while we was lodging there, when the old *Jane Gladys* was being repaired that time."

"Ah, of course, I remember now!" said Mr. Lock. "A nice, comfortable, homely place it was, too!"

"And you've sent Sinnett *there* to start questioning and arguing and hexplaining?" roared Mr. Tridge. "Why, Sam and me ran up a bill for the 'ole six weeks we stopped there, and then we skipped off without paying. And *now*—"



Tatoosh of Lone Mountain

*The story of a dog that went back
to type in the Olympic Mountains.*

By R. M. AND MAVERICK TERRELL

HIS name was not Tatoosh originally, but Tartuffe and he was born not in the wild ravines of Lone Mountain but in a highly sterilized kennel in Antwerp. He came of a pure strain of Belgian sheep dog which originated in Germany and has been crossed with the wolves of the Juras until there has been developed the strain known as the police dog. The early adventures of Tatoosh do not enter into this tale, stirring though they were. For when Tatoosh left the shores of his native land with his new and last master, Captain John Allenby of Lone Mountain, Washington, he carried the scars of shrapnel in his magnificent shoulder, and two decorations from the Allies reposed in a velvet box cherished by his master, who had not a few scars and decorations of his own.

It was with the joy of the returned exile that John Allenby resumed his former life as rancher and timber owner on the wild slopes of Lone Mountain in the foothills of the Olympics. The sound of wind booming through its many thousands of spruce and fir trees was the only lullaby

he had ever known. He had grown up straight and strong, and perhaps a little somber, like the trees he loved so well, and all during the long, long bloody trail of war their dim green vistas were to him the place where dreams come true.

But to Tatoosh it was a new world, something utterly beyond his experience, something which tugged at the very heart of his being and awoke the hitherto sleeping instincts of his Jura ancestor.

A truly magnificent beast was Tatoosh. His sleek back with the black streak down it, was fully three feet from the ground; his head with the upright sensitive ears, was set with royal grace upon a powerful neck and his chest would have done credit to a young bull. His great plumed tail curled up over his back. It was a flaunting crest of a tail which neither pain nor hunger nor the terror of death could lower. His amber eyes were unflinching—wise, observant eyes that regarded the world with a sort of smile of tolerant good nature—except when they looked at two things. When they looked at his master they became wells of love, submissive, wor-

shipping dog love, which is the most unselfish love on earth. And when they looked at his enemy they became red points of fire, relentless, fearless and terrible. For though Tatoosh was nine-tenths dog the other tenth was wolf, the killer to whom mercy is unknown. He was young when he came to Lone Mountain, not more than two years old and never in his life had he known an hour's freedom. He had never left his yard except in the company of human beings nor gone the distance of a city block except upon some errand which demanded his arrival at a certain place as speedily as possible and in spite of all obstacles. It is the ability to learn this that makes the police dog.

THE life at Lone Mountain puzzled Tatoosh at first, then it bored him and finally, he began, in the new surroundings, to develop along new lines. He learned to hunt game, bear, coyotes, lynx, even the terrible cougar, one stroke of whose paw can rip a dog as if he were a sack. He learned the season for deer and that he must not kill outside the season; he learned that he must protect the animals which belong to man. Cattle, sheep, horses and calves he guarded indefatigably.

When, after two years, another love came to Captain Allenby, Tatoosh realized new responsibilities had come to him. He had now the greatest treasure of all to protect, Captain Allenby's wife, and a year later still another treasure, his son. Soon as might be, little Jackie Allenby learned to walk, holding on to Tatoosh's shaggy coat while the great animal moved slowly and cautiously, nosing the baby gently and encouraging the uncertain little feet. If he had loved his master and his master's wife he seemed fairly to worship the boy.

One night in the following spring as Tatoosh lay beside the hearth fire he heard a strange call, quavering and faint, far away among the night-veiled hills. Too far and faint for human ears to hear it lost itself among the familiar noises of the moment, the crackle of the fire, the voices of Allenby and his wife in the next room, the prattle of the child. Only the dog heard it and the horses out in the stable who began to stamp restlessly. Tatoosh listened a moment with uplifted head and taut ears, then with a sigh laid his head down again upon the bearskin rug. But his eyes remained open, puzzled

and wondering. For the cry was unlike anything he had ever heard before; it affected him as nothing had ever affected him before. It set vibrating deep down in his being, fine chords of longing and restlessness. The walls of the well-loved cabin seemed suddenly close, the human beings alien and remote. But little Jackie came and sat down beside him, weaving his fat fingers in the dog's shaggy hair and murmuring sounds which the dog evidently understood. For some incomprehensible reason he was not allowed to lick Jackie's face, so he contented himself with touching the lad's hair with the tip of his tongue once while nobody was looking. Jackie snuggled down beside his friend and went to sleep with his head against the great chest. But in his dreams the dog still heard that elusive, faint and troubling cry and he moved his paws restlessly and sighed.

The next morning Tatoosh, guarding some young calves in a field upon the edge of the forest, suddenly lifted his head, then rose to his feet. He took scent not from the ground but from the air. He held his muzzle pointed straight at the sky and that sensitive organism told him things. It told him that a strange animal was in the vicinity, not near, yet in the path of the wind, an animal the scent of which aroused in him conflicting emotions of hatred and delight. The hair rose along his spine and he glanced slowly about, scanning the sunlit grass sloping into the blue-black shadow of the trees on the upper side of the field. It was from that direction, but far away, that the scent came. Presently it died out entirely and Tatoosh lay down in the warm sun again and dozed.

MEANTIME, a few miles up in the reaches of thick spruce and hemlock, a female wolf, straying far from her haunts among the uncut timber of the uplands, led thither by that mysterious force which guides mate to mate across unnumbered miles, settled herself to sleep in a sheltered nook on the top of a hill, to wait until nightfall.

That night after all the household slept Tatoosh, lying on the back porch of the ranch-house, heard again, the eerie cry, more distinctly now and quite near. All the dog in him was inflamed to hatred and fear, but the wolf in him responded to the mating call. Unwillingly almost

he pattered down to the edge of the clearing and sat in the shadow line, staring, intent upon something moving among the dimly lit glades of the woods, and, at once repelled and attracted, troubled, desirous, curious. Presently into sight came a slender, tawny beast with delicately tapering ankles and long amber eyes like his own, and moving with the sinuous grace of all things young, untamed and wilful. She eyed the dog with equally mixed feelings. He reeked with the taint of man, her arch enemy, but was larger, more powerful, swifter and stronger than any wolf she had ever seen. The instinct toward betterment of the race which scientists pigeon-hole under the heading "selection of species," urged her to him. That her wiles were not successful, only added fuel to the flame of her admiration.

For hours he struggled, a battle between instincts raging in his heart, a moral struggle that frightened him because now, for the first time, he did not know what to do, whether to remain where he was, true to his trust of defending his master's possessions against all prowlers, or to follow this bewitching, amber-eyed beauty into the mysterious distances from which she had come. Finally he realized, it would seem, that by commanding the female, breaking her will to his, he might obey both instincts. He would not go to her nor obey the laws of her tribe but she should come to him and obey the laws of his tribe. It is a conclusion as old as masculinity, and the young wolf, wise with the wisdom that is as old as femininity, yielded, knowing in her heart of hearts what she knew.

For several days thereafter she lay well hidden in the thickets near by while Tatoosh attended to his tasks of guarding and herding. But at twilight he slipped away into the forest and ran with her farther and farther up into the mountains. True to his commands the wolf restrained herself and did not kill calf or sheep but made her kill of wild things far away. And then, for the first time, Tatoosh learned the joy of hunting in pairs, of stalking animals too large and dangerous for one dog to attack, of running and playing with a companion as swift, as fearless and almost as powerful as himself. The evening fireside knew him no more, but in wild and lonely ravines he drank deep of a freedom such as he had never before imagined. He learned to kill not for food

but for sheer love of the killing. All that was wolf in him awoke and rejoiced in the new life. He ran farther and farther into the reaches of the upper hills and came home later and later in the morning, so tired that he fell almost instantly into profound slumber and had there been anything to trouble his charges he would not have known it.

ALLENBY noted his absences and understood them, assuming his mate to be some coyote or neighbor rancher's dog, though it was many miles to the next place. But as the great dog's absences became longer and longer Allenby's worries grew. The dog was thin from running and the gaunt lines of the wolf showed strongly in him. He took to carrying his head low, his long, amber eyes taking on a sinister gleam, and he walked silently now and lightly, on the tip of his toes. Allenby knew well the influence of the wild upon those who have wilderness blood. He had seen men on remote ranches, cut off from their kind, become what the world knows as insane. He feared a like fate for Tatoosh, so he rode to the thirty-mile-distant town and returned with a stout chain.

At first the dog was puzzled, then hurt at the indignity imposed upon him by the best-loved being of his world, finally to become infuriated at the enforced separation from his mate. He chafed, howled, pleaded, but to no avail. His master, apart from an appearance at the nearest window and a curt command to be still, seemed impervious to his pleading or cajolery. It was then that he commenced to use his brains. He found that by stretching his chain to full length his collar rode up to the base of his ears. By wiggling his head he succeeded at length in pulling the collar over his head and escaping. Also he was wise enough to return early the next morning. His master thereupon made a harness for him of strong leather straps and, try as he would, he could not get it off. Finally he called his mate, lurking impatiently in the brush. She came at last, trembling in every limb at the nearness to the haunts of much-feared man, and, reassured, chewed the binding strap loose and released Tatoosh. She determined then to win him away from his home altogether. Had Tatoosh been all dog she would not have succeeded in her attempts, but she had a powerful ally in the dog's own dual nature. He

had tasted of freedom, real freedom in which he need answer to no one for his goings and comings. He had heard the siren voice of the wilderness where strength is king and there is no overlord to say him yea or nay. He had learned the excitement of battling in the open with other creatures, strength pitted against strength, wit against wit, with no gun shot to save one at the crucial moment. Summer was at its full, the heady summer of the hills when the aromatic scent of firs intoxicates like wine, when the blood sings in the veins and all things man-made and transient fade into insignificance before the eternal verities of the hills.

Tatoosh chased a deer far up into a ravine, contested his prey bitterly with a pair of lynx and won. Gorged with warm and deliciously flavored flesh, he lay down to rest in a hollow lined with grass, sweet-scented, soft and cool against his weary feet. The long, slow day wheeled by on sunlit hours, utterly quiet, utterly peaceful. Here was no master to waken him to tasks, no silly calves to nose back from the dangerous fringe of the forest where lurking prowlers might be hidden, no ignominious chain to bind him like a slave. He was his own master and more, master of the beautiful creature who lay languidly in the sun near by, stretching her delicate limbs and smoothing her shining, tawny hair.

Allenby, the cabin, even little Jackie, seemed vague and far away, creatures of another world. But this sun-steeped domain, this boundless kingdom of the good brown earth from which he sprang, this wild free life, with delicious food for the taking and delicious untroubled sleep—this was real. The Earth Spirit called to the dog and the blood of his ancestors answered the call. He settled deeper into the sun-warmed grass and closed his eyes with a great sigh of content. The wilderness had won.

FAR up the Mountain, in a ravine that was a mere narrow cleft between two hills, blue-veined with lupin, sweet with leopard lilies and aromatic grasses, they made their lair and there the end of summer found them. Grass was dry and game moved farther down the slopes, following the brawling, mountain stream, green as the verdure that rose like walls of shadow stained malachite on either side. Tatoosh, reluctant to leave his now defenseless mate for long, eyed for the first time a

fat calf grazing with its mother in the one cleared field of a homesteader. Food was essential to the wolf just then, frequent and nourishing food, and the man-made taboo fell before her need, the need of the prospective mother. Tatoosh killed the calf and they feasted on tender veal. The homesteader set traps and himself laid in ambush, but he had to deal not with creatures inexperienced in the ways of man, but with one who knew well all the hunter's subterfuges and avoided them with contemptuous skill. Thus from a renegade Tatoosh became an outlaw.

With the coming of fall the homesteader's six months of occupancy were fulfilled and he betook himself and his cow to haunts nearer civilization and Tatoosh and his mate, and their three cubs, were left undisputed masters of the ravine. But the taste for veal and mutton had been pleasant and Tatoosh ranged far afield for such delicacies, bringing home large portions to his family. It was on one such trip that tragedy struck at the little family, the relentless tragedy of the wilderness that the hills ever conceal in their silent bosoms.

Tatoosh returned from a distant kill to find a huge cougar seated beside his lair. The great beast regarded the wolf dog with green, contemptuous eyes, licking her chops. There was a red stain on the leafage. Near by the torn body of the mother wolf lay, her silken hair stained and clotted, her lithe grace frozen in death, while torn branches, trampled fern, and uprooted vines gave testimony of the struggle mother love had made before succumbing to the superior strength of the invader. The amber eyes of the wolf dog changed as they contemplated the scene. As he stood facing the wreck of his home and family he underwent a change as marked as that of any human Jekyll and Hyde. The great eyes narrowed, became mere slits of fire. The hair rose stiffly along his back, the shoulders hunched and the head drooped into the deadly, low-swung pose of the hunting wolf, his tail stood straight out; he seemed in a few moments to become another animal, a gigantic, evil-eyed incarnation of rage and malignity. His lips drew back into a line of hideous menace and sharp, white fangs protruded as he launched himself at his foe. The cougar, most fearless of forest marauders, knew that it was to be a battle to the death.

The cougar is all cat; she fights with wits, with stealth, with veiled launchings, the grace of which belies the enormous power behind them. Hers is the rapier sheathed in velvet, but the wolf fights openly with teeth and claw and cable-like muscle, and with seemingly tireless speed. It was a hideous battle, from the sounds of which all lesser denizens of the forest fled and hid themselves, trembling. It lasted through the gray, grim dawn into the full light of a green and watery day. And at the end of it Tatoosh crept into his lair and lay exhausted, licking the blood from twenty wounds, one leg dragging from a bite that had just missed the hamstring. He was too weak from loss of blood to give more than one howl as he touched the body of his mate, the long drawn, quavering, indescribably mournful wolf howl in which there was no note of triumph even though he had avenged her destruction.

Toward evening, as he lay cleansing his wounds, wracked and quivering with pain, he felt a soft, inquiring nozzle against his side and a little round body pressed against him. One of the pups had escaped. He had obeyed his mother's commands to lie hidden deep in the hole she had defended with her life and only hunger had forced him out. Slowly and weakly the wolf dog and his pup moved away, together, from the scene of the tragedy, to take up their life elsewhere in the forest. For a time they lived upon tender rabbits, quail and grouse which the pup soon learned to relish and very soon to catch for himself. Slowly the great wolf dog's wounds healed, his muscles reasserted themselves and winter found him again powerful, though he still limped and certain of his scars would never leave him.

It was a light winter of interminable rains but little snow and the two fared well in the lower valleys. Memories of little caressing hands and of warm hearth fires and soft rugs sometimes troubled Tatoosh, but they were dim in his outlaw memory.

As for the pup, it grew as only a healthy, well-fed wolf pup can grow and spring found him as large as his father, black and tawny beneath, and slanting of eye, altogether a magnificent specimen of his breed. Together they worked back into the uncut timber far away from the haunts of man. Another year rolled around. Had Tatoosh been all wolf the

two would long since have parted company after the manner of the wolf/breed, but there still lived in the dog a necessity for affection. He had loved his masters, he had loved his home and his mate, and the cub, this young thing of his own blood, took the place of all that he had lost. He cherished him with faithfulness and devotion, fended for him and taught him much wisdom gained from the ways of men. And the cub, in the half-contemptuous manner of all youth, accepted the dog's love and stayed with him, sharing his kill and his lair.

NOW John Allenby owned several thousand acres of virgin forest land in the hills and into the edge of this, in the month of May when all the forest was white with dogwood and sweet with syringa and blueberry blossom, he came with a timber cruiser, his wife and little Jackie. On the edge of the stream that fed a little lonely mountain lake they camped, and there too, farther up the stream, was the lair of Tatoosh and his son.

Drawn by the odor of cooking food and by the indomitable curiosity of all denizens of the wild, the wolf, son of Tatoosh, crept to the edges of the clearing in which Allenby had pitched camp, and there watched the white gleaming tent and the strange and terrifying beings who moved about, and the still stranger thing that flared red and crackled in front of the tent.

Lunch finished on the second day, the timber cruiser moved on to a grove of cedars and Mrs. Allenby, having finished her tasks for the time being, lay down for a nap beside Jackie. Jackie, however, had already had a nap that morning and was inclined to look upon further sleep as a waste of time. For a while he lay quietly, drowsing and watching the shadows of birds and dancing leaves upon the white roof of the tent. But presently this palled as a pastime and he bethought himself of something more exciting, so with another glance at his sleeping mother he slid noiselessly off the cot bed and tiptoed out of the tent.

On the edge of the clearing the child saw a great, shaggy, cedar windfall and beneath it an intriguing depression, which looked as though it led to a cave where almost anything might live. Bears sometimes lived in such caves he knew. Fear

was something which Jackie's training had not comprehended and so, with curiosity and in the spirit of adventure, he trudged toward the dark depression, plunging through the bracken which met over his head and steering carefully around briars that clutched at his coveralls as with detaining fingers. Deeper and deeper into the green gloom of the thicket he advanced, and closer and closer to a pair of sinister eyes watching him with speculation and greed.

FARTHER back in the thicket, in a cool depression, Tatoosh suddenly awoke and sniffed the breeze. Strange scents were afloat, scents that had not touched his nostrils for many a long month. Stiffly he rose to his feet, for the muscle of his leg which the cougar had bitten had never entirely regained its old elasticity. And Tatoosh was growing old. He had lost more than flesh and blood in that great battle; he had lost his youth. For the first time, now, as he awoke, the wilderness seemed lonely to him. The vagrant scent upon the air brought back the wish for a touch from a caressing hand, for a soft rug beneath him and a hearth fire and the consciousness of man's protection about him. His son, he knew, would soon leave him and go searching for a mate, a mate who would be of the wild and who would look with suspicion and distrust upon the older animal, the wolf who was also dog. So he turned and followed the scent down the breeze.

Presently Tatoosh came to the edge of the thicket and looked out. And there, sitting upon a fallen tree bole, clutching a late trillium in his fist, he beheld a man cub, his man cub, he knew, as the once familiar scent touched his nostrils. He looked over the yellow hair of the little lad squarely into the covetous eyes of his son. And between the two there flashed a message. "Keep off," said the younger animal. "This is my prize." "Get away from there!" said the older dog. A low growl came from the throat of the younger. He suddenly resolved to defy his father, to throw off the leading strings and assert himself as his own master. But the older wolf dog growled back at him, so menacing a threat that Jackie heard it and raised his head, staring about into the brush. Unsteadily he rose to his feet then suddenly he saw Tatoosh at the edge of the clearing. Fearlessly he looked at his one-

time friend and remembered. "'Toosh!" he cried. "'Toosh, you come back!" He held out his arms and the great dog came toward him. The child flung his arms around the shaggy neck and Tatoosh licked his face and neck in an ecstasy of delight. Now, from the thicket advanced the younger wolf, growling. He did not know what this strange fraternizing of his father and the man cub meant, but he saw that his father was cutting in on his preserves. Tatoosh whirled upon him with gleaming fangs and angry eyes, and the young wolf backed away glaring. So the old fellow wanted a fight! Well, he'd give him a fight, put him in his place once for all. Trying to take his supper away just because he was older and his father! The two animals measured each other's strength. Once before in a crucial fight Tatoosh had become all wolf, wolf fighting for wolf against a common enemy. But now he was all dog. With death in his eye, he advanced upon the powerful young wolf. Straight at his throat the younger animal sprang and the two locked in a struggle that sent Jackie screaming and brought the terrified mother from the tent and Allenby and Jackson crashing back through the brush. They found Jackie backed against a tree while the two beasts rolled on the ground before him. The mother caught the boy in her arms while Allenby frantically shouted to them both to get out of the possible range of his rifle. But when Jackie saw the gun in his father's hands he broke away from his mother. "It's 'Toosh, Daddy!" he cried. "Don't shoot my 'Toosh!" Allenby lowered his rifle and looking closer recognized the great beast.

"Tatoosh and a timber wolf, by golly!" he shouted. "Well, let 'em fight it out."

That fight was won at a bitter cost. At its end Tatoosh stood over the body of his son, swaying with weakness, the blood running from many deep wounds, and one foot dragging quite useless. Breathing with difficulty and with eyes misted, he turned his great head toward the boy. Then, dragging himself forward, he laid down at the feet of Allenby.

Thus it came to pass that Tatoosh, with a defective hindfoot and many scars, came again to lie on the bearskin rug before the fire on winter nights. And if sometimes his great eyes were fixed on the blue, far hills they always came back again to rest on the child beside him.



Catlin's Waterloo

A vivid story of the Romany Road—of two hobo pals and their itinerant adventures out among the big and little Philippines.

By PAUL ANNIXTER

IT all came back to me just a little while ago—the luring, demanding, irresistible call of the “tie-path.” It came up to my window on the wings of just two little sounds—the two short blasts on the whistle of an outgoing freight down in the yards—the “high-ball.” It was an ungodly hour in the morning, and I’d just turned in after a midnight session with some of the boys down in the old press-room. We’d sat up a long time, the lot of us, spinning yarns, the morning edition all staked out to dry. I was dragging tired when I turned in, but that old call jerked me up again, to roll me another brown paper and hang out the window, watching the red halo of her boiler as she lumbered out of the yards, painting her way in steam.

The old call, right enough, that used to set the blood singing through my veins and bring the itch to the soles of my feet—the sound that calls to me still, that calls to all who know the Road, from the day they leave it till they pass the last mile-post and check out!

What was it the high-ball brought back? Well, first it brought the *feel*, and the old glad rush of the night air in my face, then the road-song of a thousand trains and the swaying and lurching of the car, the whole ten years I’d spent between the rails, on the winding, rolling, never-ending “wallaby.” And lastly it brought back the picture of my little old road pardner, Conny Catlin, the whitest, biggest little tramp that ever split a “short-bit” with a pal.

Man, oh, man, how it all did pile down on me as that old bull-eagle roared out of the yards, shaking the earth! She was using sand, she was, arching her back and grinding it into the rails. Once she got rolling, it was a through night's run for the west; I could see that. All the three years I'd put in in the coops of men were like nothing at the sound of that high-ball. Tired as I was, I lights the lights and sits down to think, which accounts for this tale.

SOMEHOW, I kept thinking of Conny Catlin. I want you to see this great little guy as I saw him. A burned little gnome of a man he was; and he limped, the painful hitch of the rawhide swagman. Homely? Man, he was the homeliest man I ever saw, what with the sun and wind of a half-dozen continents and eleven archipelagoes, and that rimless ruin of a derby he wore year in and year out. And the neck of him—the scrawny pullet neck of him! It was raw and red, with one of them emotional Adam's apples that ran up and down in the gullet like a piston-rod every time he took a swallow.

I reckon Conny only measured up about one by four—and we called him the Crumb sometimes, he was such a little scrap; but he was tough as an oak post, hairy as a cave-man and broad in the nostril. He hove from Wales. That little man could worm his way through the kinks and joints of a moving train like a squirrel. I've seen him curl up right comfortable in a tool-box or on the steps of a flyer, after the platform had been let down.

One might have judged from Conny's face and serious, twisted brow that it was his nature to worry and look ahead, but in truth there never was a man who let old Mother Fate lead him by the hand like my swaddy. You couldn't plan your life more than two whistling-posts ahead, with him in the offing. Though Conny's used the seven oceans for spittoons, and cast off his socks from Baffin Bay to the Tropic of Cancer in one season, never a day passed, rain or shine, but he made a new move in making the far horizon his rear skyline.

There was money back of him, too, most of the time. Nearly every winter he'd shove his little forty a week over the blotter of the First National Bank down in El Paso, where he and old Long Orrick used to run whisky and drawn-work over the line. He done the same down in the

Islands, too, he told me; but had to can it before the Government made him American consul to Billibid. The fact is, he wasn't quite through with them Philippine smuggling maneuvers yet, as you'll see later.

But no few bolivars cut any figure with the Crumb. It was the wallaby with him, first and last. Come spring, and you'd run onto him beside the coffee-fire in the "jungles" of Los Angeles, working leisurely northward; long about August you'd find him asleep in the shade beside the tank up at Mondak, Montana, his blanket and frypan beside him. At dawn he never knew where he'd be, come sundown.

He had the weakness, Conny did—a bit of a lesion, he called it. He was the brand of bo, in his own words, "that had to take a jog back into the ruts of the righteous for a blow-out every time he knocked down a she-note or two." Yes, it was the red-eye route, the long white road of the rum. Lord, don't I know it! This is the tale of how Conny laid off the drink for good, down in the Islands.

IT was our second season together. The first we'd spent as bunkies in a cavalry outfit in Arizona. Later, as noncoms, we'd done a trick in the Philippines, and were in it at the wind-up of those last dirty little Luzon affairs. The two of us had been separated toward the finish, sent off on different dispatches, and it wasn't till after the pay-off that I met up with the Crumb again, by good luck, in Manila. We'd seen a lot of privation during them two years—hunger, heat, sand-flies and a close-written page full of ugly little skirmishes on the back of our discharges. So right off we starts in living up to the last minute, them first free days in town, spending our finals with a whole lot of noise, and knowing no law except what civilians live up to. But there wasn't any more wearing week, all things considered, than that in which we waited around for a steamer to take us back to the States, and Smith Creek, Arkansas.

Well, sir, we didn't make that steamer, for *vino* and miscellaneous reasons that don't belong to this story. Catlin took it for an omen that we was due to stick it out in the tropics. I objected. This lotus-island stuff gets my animal in time, but the Crumb, he wasn't to be side-tracked. Man, dear, talk about your barracks-room lawyers with their whiffletree

arguments! The Crumb had a parcel of the dangdest humpbacked philosophy I ever listened to. No man that's ever tore up stakes and followed the ties could live ten minutes under his line of fire. I can see him yet, lying there on his back in the banana-house, him in his five-dollar mufti, arguing with me, with his fry-pan—the everlasting fry-pan that he'd named the Welcome Mulligan—on the pack beside him. Tan and free he was, breathing the very breath and lure of the outside.

Just a minute before, he'd woke me up out of an afternoon siesta with some sentences that summed up the fact that milk and honey was to be had in a place called Chicita Corno, without money and without price.

I lay silent for some time, partly because I wasn't awake enough to appreciate this communication in the dead heat of a Luzon midday, and partly because I was sick of the tropics—the whole fever-ridden chain of them. I might have dropped off again, but by now I'd made the discovery that my bunk was haunted by more than the regulation winged man-eaters. So I sits up and rolls me a dobie and tells the Crumb what I'd told him some twenty times the last two days.

"I'm done with the Islands," says I, right crusty. "Look at me! I'm a walking liver-complaint. My blood's yellow; my hide's yellow. I'm so full of quinine the weeds die where I spit. I'm going back to Arkansaw."

"Bli' me," says he, "I didn't think as how no old ex-buck like you'd 'eave back to the juniper, 'fore the smell o' the smoke'd died away. The Islands aint so musty. Manila's on the map, mind ye, an' Iloilo—same ol' Iloilo, swaddy."

Iloilo! That's where the Java girls hang out, and I'm here to second the Crumb as how them girls is some dancers.

THEN he reiterates a recitation that would make a land-dealer yellow with shame, on the merits of that there Chicita Corno. He told me as how he got it straight from Yellow Maconachie. I sits up at that. Yellow Maconachie was the blackest tramp that ever hit the Islands, but what he didn't know about lotus-living wasn't in books.

"Swaddy boy," he keeps shooting, "it aint no tank town again for us. Not no more! An' we're done with the juniper, an' the khaki too. It's the wallaby for us,

boy. Carn't ye see it? It's writ in the books."

"The road?" says I, kind of whispering it. "Why, Con, you said that like a lover."

"It does us for a spell yet, Bill, old champion," says he.

The blasted hairy little frijole, he knew my weakness better than I knew it, he did. I watches him pick up his swag, pile and move it out under the shade of a palm and lay him down, pillowing his head on it with a sigh. Man alive, it was wonderful weather in that soft, smoky country. There we both lay stretched out in the shadows, our shoes off, Catlin laughing and blowing smoke out of his ears like a blooming deep-sea animal—him having busted both his drums as a South Sea diver in his youth. We was way out on the edge of the old town. Man, we sat and stared out over that road that went by the banana-house, and the warm wind puffed in our ears, and the birds called to us, or so the Crumb said. The branches on both sides tossed in the wind and beckoned, as if telling us some of the things that lay beyond, along that winding reptile of a road.

"Crumb," says I at last, "I reckon you're right."

"Ay, right—right as rain," says he absently, still looking off over the country. "For better or for worse, we sticks—eh, swaddy?"

I gives him my hook on that.

SO it was we hung around the stone pier at the Pasig's mouth for two days more, waiting for "the ark over the isthmus," as the Crumb put it, meaning the little inter-island steamer for Chicita Corno and the lower Islands. That one we caught, and two days later we made Chicita Corno in style.

But that was only the beginning. There was a big surprise waiting for us. We'd expected nothing but a dry bone of land with sand and a few coco-palms, virgin to the white man's foot; but we found a good-sized town and two droning old mahogany-mills, with a hundred white hands between them, and a couple of whistles like the noon blast of a shirt-factory back in New York.

I think Catlin'd been expecting to be hailed by the natives as an eldorado king. Instead, owing to a supercargo of *vino* aboard ship, and a night's sitting in an innocent little game called twenty-one, we struck land with a combined treasury of one louey, a short-bit and two Sitting Bulls,

which is one dollar and twelve cents, English. I being custodian, I remember, of the amount to the right of the decimal.

Man, we'd both been craving linen under our bones for six months past, but we makes the best of it. You know how all sorrows can be drowned by the lights of even a strange town—and a louey in your jeans?

We stuck together, and applied for a job in the mill on the side of the creek we happened to be at the time. The second day sees us drawing two dollars and board with the hell-beatin'est outfit that ever swamped timber from Michigan to Min-danao.

THINGS went along pretty smooth for two weeks, till pay-day comes around. On the tenth, somebody jams a spike into the saws in the middle of the afternoon. Part of the floor goes up and cleaves to the roof, and the mill shuts down with a long, low cry. Nobody knew who'd done that spiking, and nobody cared much. Before dark the boys begins easing down the trail toward Palamala, led by Red Mike Hogan, our foreman. Palamala was a real hope-to-die town about a half-mile down-trail, wide open as any in your Western cow-country. She was known as the toughest harbor in the lower islands, and the hub of her was Blinky Gile's Spotlight Bar.

Now, it was plain that a big tank-fest was beginning. But that wasn't all. The first thing our boys runs into was a bunch of teamsters and swampers from the other mahogany-mill. It gradually dawns on us, from the talk we overheard, that there was a rivalry—that some bloke of the other crew had done that spiking in our mill, and that it was up to us to get even. This other mill they calls the Bamban Company.

Just ten days away was the time for the lumber-boats from Palangoa to arrive, marking the end of a half-season's output. The output of the two mills was even now. That's why the Bamban boys slowed us up with the spike; we saw that now. The biggest output had the first call at the tugs, which meant everything. You begin to get the tension in a few words.

Something had to be done; that was plain. So Red Mike, our foreman, he calls our bunch together in the back room of Blinky Gile's to hatch up something that would put the crimp in that Bamban outfit. Red Mike gets up and addresses us

solemn-like. The top-notch issue, says he, was to devise some method or means of putting the kink in the other company's activities, so we could ride over their output by the twentieth. Said he'd be glad to hear suggestions from any gent present.

Right off there was suggestions for shooting up of some party, or if desired, parties, of the other company before the following Monday; but Red Mike would have none of it. This here was a strange town, says he, far removed from the zone of law; and the police, says he, might be hostile. Then followed insinuations for the roping of some members of the rival company on the street, and a-tying of them up, which meets with the same rebuke from the chair. After that we all sits tight waiting for a word from the chief. We all knew as how there wasn't no astuter leader of men in the Islands than Red Mike.

Then what happens but the little old Crumb, he jumps up and begs leave of the chair to make a suggestion. He then asks Red Mike which man in the rival institution, to the best of his expert experience, was the king-pin in the Bamban arsenal. Right away Red Mike names the saw-filer. Then the Crumb suggests a scheme for putting the damper on the Bamban boys. The schemes before mentioned, says he, was too youthful and direct, and spelt ruction. What we wanted, says he, was something subtile. Said all we had to do was to go out and get that Bamban saw-filer so deaf, dumb and blind drunk he wouldn't know his own name for a week. There was only ten days left, says he, and if we could lay our man out, by social conversation and red liquor, till he couldn't move, their hash was cooked, because there wasn't no substitutes lying around those parts. Furthermore, this method, says he, was all open and aboveboard, and it was a challenge to our fellows, says he, to go out and battle a man in the open like that, in the ancient and manly acoustics of tumbler and demi-john.

Right away everybody sees that the Crumb has the correct idea and begins kicking themselves for not having seen it before, it was so plumb simple. Yes, sir, beyond the peradventure of a doubt, that saw-filer was the party for treatment. Then Red Mike states that it devolved upon the bunch to pick the man that was to do the job.

At that everybody of course names the Crumb. They'd all seen something of his

speed at putting away red liquor under a pull, and in plain duty and honor, they was bound to admit that there wasn't a man of us qualified like him for such a job, he having brought up the idea in the first place.

The Crumb just having swallowed a chaser, he bowed to the chief and deferred, saying much as he appreciated the bouquet, and the high rating of his abilities, he wanted that the man who drank the Bam-ban representative drunk be none other than Red Mike himself, the whitest man that ever wore hair, he said. Said Mike could do it; he knew he could—no living man with a face and neck like Red Mike could ever be Waterlooed when it came to stoking away distilled liquor; said he'd put up a she-note that Red Mike could drink with any man in the crowd till he was coiled up like a rattler in a gopher's nest.

Red Mike raises a hand. He'd have none of it, and the crowd still calls for the Crumb, as having all the requisite endowments. So in the end, the Crumb it was.

THEN comes the question of finding the party of the second part. So the meeting adjourns, and we all trails in through Blinky's front bar, a-sizing up of the Bam-ban outfit, standing four deep at the rail. None of us knew a man of the other party, so a few of us horns in alongside to overhear stray bits. Catlin, he was standing close to me, dallying with his glass with one hand in the coconut bowl, when a stray bit of talk blows down from the Bam-ban end of the bar.

"Sh-h-h," says I to the Crumb, holding up a hand.

"Wot's eatin' ye?" says he, lowering his fifth *vino* down his throat. "Think you're a steam radiator?"

"Listen," says I. "Listen to the crowd just back of you."

In the interval we orders another drink, and then another stray waft of talk floats down—something relating to saws.

"Sh-h, sh-h!" says I again.

"Sh-h, yourself!" says he. "You better see a plumber in the mornin'!"

"Easy," says I. "Low bridge! Take a careful slant back of you and make the big guy with the white hair and the third eyebrow. That's your man. He's the saw-filer."

So the Crumb twirls his neck round, subtle-like, then stakes me to a baleful glance.

"'Im, is it?" says he. "Bli' me, I don't like 'is looks. Looks like he had a job in a wart-works an' had carried off samples."

"Anyhow, that's your man," says I. "Take him or leave him!" And with that I removes my embargo over to Red Mike.

The Crumb, he takes one more look. Man, that saw-filer was a great red-neck Swede fellow, and he was bigger than a cathedral with the scaffolds on. His eyes were a pale china blue, and so close together they could look at each other round the bridge of his nose. Well, sir, as for striking at the point of most mortal resistance, there didn't seem to be no question as to this chap being it. Man, he looked about as vulnerable and nerve-ridden as a macadam road; and standing there, sizing up this proposition alongside the poor old Crumb, our fellows gets all unhopd for a minute. But Red Mike, he leads us out and explains.

A man, says he, aint to be rated by his altitooode in length or the size of his hat-band. 'Specially was this so, says he, when it come to drinkin'. Science, says he, taught us that the size of a man didn't have no relation nohow to his chamberin' of liquor an' a-holdin' of same. In fact, says he, red licker takes a-holt of the vitals of a big man in good condition like this here saw-filin' gent even quicker than it would take holt of the abbreviated vitals of a little wart like the Crumb. An' beside that, this here Mr. Ans Handerson—that was his name—was a foreigner of Northern breed an' descent an' therefore not acclimated up to copin' with tropic isles.

Red Mike further asks anyone within hearing of his voice if a Northern man didn't run plumb loco under the combined fires of tropic heat and tropic liquor.

WELL, that argument fetched us, and we draws up the last clause setting the date of the match for Sunday P. M. With that we all eased off to get a night's rest.

So Sunday come around, and come afternoon, the Crumb mopes down and finds this here Mr. Ans Handerson and invites him honey-like to 'see if there is anything left in the bar; and Handerson, he falls right into the trap, not apparently suspicioning nothing, and said he didn't care if he did. So the two of them kaleidoscopes down towards Blink's together, arm in arm.

The rest of us began dropping in by two's

and three's an hour later. Well, sir, there they sits at the hind end of the rear room, sloughing up liquor and free barroom vittles of all sorts and dimensions. Already they was both in fair mimosa condition. The Crumb was steaming up on the social confab, leaning over confidential-like, while the old Norsk sat slumped back in his chair, his wall-eyes staring about at the pictures of the pool-sharks that covered Blink's walls, without apparently seeing nothing. That Swede was sure one saving disposition. We all knowed as how he was pulling down his little twelve bolivars a day, but as yet he hadn't slid a short bit over the table.

Catlin was still pert. That little guy'd never leave a ship till the main truck was under water, and the rats and the roaches had took to the masts.

After a half-hour Catlin gets up and walks stifflike over to the bar, carrying the tray to show he's still working his pins, and we hear him ordering up another bowl and another dose of pizen for the Swede. As he makes a long tack by my table on the home trip, balancing a tray of them large, low-necked panetella lady-oysters, I calls out in a husky voice to cheer him up like:

"It's a dusty night on the river," says I.

He stops at that and weaves around in the center of the floor. He couldn't see more than three feet away, but he starts for me straight as a die, coming by the sound.

"Yes, sir," says he, stopping and swaying before my table. "An' it's a hard night on the moors too," says he.

"How you feeling?" I asks.

He shakes himself together at that—says he was drinking, he was—says he was going to drink till the li'le birds toppled off the bushes, and the sharks come up on shore, says he would drink till the old dried lizards we know'd would curl up and die, and the green persimmons fell off'n the tall trees where Gawd had made 'em grow. And then he makes tearful reference to his snowy bed which he would be a-seekin' come sunup.

"But what's the matter?" says I. "You, waiting on yourself like this! Why don't you whistle up the trained retriever?"

"Pss-t," says he, subtle-like. "The more ye keep on your feet, the clearer you are in the noggin in a bout like this."

"Give us a tip from the inside," I says then. "How's this thing coming out?"

"Listen," says he, coughing till his vest

bunches up on his back. "She's now parst midnight. This day's sun-a-risin' in the east over Palamala, Iloilo, Chicita Corno, Bamban, Brooklyn, Hoboken an' all points west, will look down a-seeking to gild the collective activity of them there Bamban sawyers upriver. But what'll she find? Only a sad scene of inchoate confusion in which they aint no more sign of a straw-headed saw-filer than the infant Moses, an' don't you forget it."

With that the Crumb lets go of a hic-cough that comes mighty near undressing him, and edges over to his victim again.

WELL sir, they was at it again. I watches them both lowering their drinks down their throats, careful-like, inserting half the glass, like the true professional rum-hounds they was, without even jingling their eyes. Man, oh, man, it was sure phenomenal to watch the chambering of that liquor. Altogether, taking one thing with another, which they did, as fast as the barkeep could mix them up, it was sure a history-making event.

About every quarter of an hour, regular, the Crumb would get up on his pins and weave over to the bar for a handful of coco-parings to gain his equilibrium.

They were drinking straight *vino* now, as a white man will when he lets the bars down in the Islands. If you ever seen a man Johnstowned on *vino*, you know what it's like. The stuff aint human. It sets a man, not drunk, but plumb loco. Whisky, poor eight-year-old moonshine, is like seltzer water beside it. Man, dear, that *vino* that sailed over Blinkey's bar had a kick like vitriol, and every time it slopped over, it tried to eat a knot out of the wood.

Well sir, some seven or eight times we thinks that old Norsk's animal was cooked at last, but each time we starts to approach the center to clap the Crumb on the back, that saw-filing gent opens one of them fishy eyes of his and jerks up in his seat, making a clean pot-shot at the spittoon. Bli' me if he ever missed the bull's-eye once. You couldn't do nothing with that Viking's son.

Next thing we knew, along toward the naughty hour of three it was, the first gray streaks lighting the east, Catlin rose up from his seat, and stood there a minute swaying back and forth, trying to chin himself on his neckband. We thought he was going over to the bar to fetch some more pizen, but we was wrong. He was coughing fit to kill hisself. Some of us,

edging closer, heard him murmuring to himself some old tales of his childhood. Then he starts for the door. In the middle of the floor he steps high over a shadow, stops and rolls up his pants at the bottom. Then, before we could jump in, he goes down with a low-gurgling cry, like a hen-hawk stricken with cramps, and he don't come up no more.

Man, it was a bleak wave that broke over our delegation, standing there looking on, while our one hope and committee on irrigation lays there trying to swim out of that liquor-store dog-fashion. That man was more perfectly disguised in liquor than I ever hope to see again.

By now the Crumb was seeing the things his poor old ancestors saw, and murmuring in one of those amorous Romance tongues that even he himself don't understand. So Red Mike and me, we removes him to my room and taps him with a bed-slat for the night. Then we descends full of wrath to do the same for the Swede, but what do you think we finds? As we opens the door, that son of a Norsk had just got up out of his chair and was standing there by the table, swaying around, 'tis true, but standing—and alone! Man, that was an awful jolt to us after being all hoped up as how it was an even draw for our side at the blackest. Yes sir, there he stood, the blasted skee-jumping Scandinavian, grinning at our boys out of those bunged-up eyes of his. He was there, all right. After pawing some of the vittles off his chest and out of the underbrush of that yellow beard of his, he looks around the four walls for the bar clock. That clock was away up to the front of the bar, but he spots it and reads the hands correct first glance. Then he turns to us, jamming his old Heinie cap over his head.

"Well, fallers," says he, "ay bane have one yumpin' good time last night. Ay like to stay har and drink wit' you fallers till I can't see you; but the boss, he bane give big beer-party dis morning, an' ay want to be on time. So long."

And with that he thumps out of that juice-shop without even hitting the jamb of the door.

NEXT day the Crumb wasn't any more on the job than a night watch in a beer foundry, and the boys began staking him to a long relay of Hammam baths and antidotes.

And then, 'long about nightfall, what

blows into town, as if answering a call, but one of them little frock coats from up Manila way. Right away he sets about clearing acreage for the Kingdom of God, and, hamstringing me, if he didn't stick his main top right alongside of Blinkey Gile's bar.

We weren't much impressed with the Reverend Hartweed—that was his cogno. He lacked humor. Not only could he see but one thing at a time, but one thing all the time—that is that men had souls as pure as the dawn on the snow, even in Red Mike Hogan's outfit. He was a little stormy petrel of a fellow, Hartweed, with a hand like the end of a hickory limb, a glary eye, and a voice like falling coal.

Bli' me, but that fellow was a rocket. He'd come, he had, to shoot the fear of God through Palamala like a red-hot purgative. Within two hours after his début, he has his house of salvation pitched, and his advance agent and rah-master out on the platform blowing the trumpet of holiness. We didn't deny him nothing that night—dimes, a set of scrub prayers, nor a running guard of hearers; but somehow nobody could work up the power he wanted. The first night passes uneventful.

It never rains but it snows. That same night, as I was taking my last in Blink's place, who slides in the door but Yellow Maconachie, the Crumb's old pardner. He spots me, and edging up like a book-agent, he asks to know if I'm a pal of the Crumb. Then he gives me the tip-off. It all sums up to the fact that a revenue gent from up Palangoa way was even then making a sacrificial pilgrimage down to Palamala, and when he got there, Mack and little old Conny promised to become the sacrifice. Some old contraband doings of Yellow Mack's and his had been tracked home. Mack at the time was just making his slide north, and had stopped long enough to give Catlin the once over.

Things promised to be doing. With Conny all coiled up with cane-juice like he was, there was a fat chance of his hamstringing the long arm of the law. It sure looked as if he was going to be cholera-morbused. What was I to do? There wasn't any use trying to tell him about it. It wasn't human to ship him off crated to parts unknown, him not knowing his own name. All I does was to tip off Red Mike, and we waited.

It was the next night that the Crumb, after navigating around town like one of

them Mystic Mazes, wafts into the Reverend Hartweed's "Open every evening—everybody welcome" outfit, sort of by mistake. Now, you never can tell what a man so comprehensively disrupted as the Crumb was, will do. He's liable to kneel down and weep on your brogans, or lean over and concuss your expression.

Old Hartweed was some histrionic this night. Before that, I'd thought I was electroplated against his line of sob-stuff, but presently he has me recalling a legion of lost opportunities, and my seraphic childhood back in the tank-town. Well sir, it wasn't ten minutes before Catlin, he rose up in the center of the aisle and bust into tears. At that, old Hartweed does a flying hurdle over the rail of the rostrum, roaring "Victory!" so they must have heard it 'way over in Iloilo.

Yes sir, he came down like the Assyrians and folded old Con in his arms, and if ever a man needed it, it was the Crumb. The rest of us mavericks sneaks off soft-like after that, leaving the two of them together in the meeting-tent. Later that night I looked out and saw them come forth and go swaying down the street to where old Hartweed has a shack at the edge of town. They and the devil fights the night out there together.

THE next three evenings the meeting-tent was dark, but during the daytime we sees old Hartweed working on Catlin till the trail's hot. Then on the fourth night the trumpet knells once more, calling us to the tent of holiness. We all answers.

There was the Crumb in the rostrum, all curried up like a choir-boss, his coat on, and a scroll-like mosaic of rat-colored hair laid over his thin forehead. One of old Hartweed's number seventeen collars rests like a life gear over the fourteen and a half isthmus of the Crumb, making you think of a runt-pony in a Percheron outfit. He has a hymn-book in one hand and a halo of joy all over his map.

Old Hartweed bears down heavy in spots that night, but most of his oration is of the merciful sort that appeals to an outdoors man. When it was all over, the Crumb he jumps up, props the hymn-book against the back of a chair to steady himself, and ventures a stanza or two, which wasn't particularly well memorized. He calls us a bunch of frog-mouths, tells us that this here Hartweed was all right, he was, and as straight a man as ever rooted

for sanctimony. He tells us we had souls in every measly hide of us, because Hartweed said so. Then advancing ferocious-like to the edge of the platform, the little guy roars at us to get down and pray.

Well sir, the spirit was flowing by then, like it used to, and we prays. Even Blinky Gile himself mopes into the tent a bit later. The power had got to him too, as he stood behind his desolate bar.

We decided to hold that beginning. Right then and there we swears that if a clerical gent could horn into Palamala and pick out the rangiest, hell-beatin'est rum-bound in our midst, scraping the same into an ornament inside of three days, we'd keep it for him. Yes sir, we'd keep the spirit alive in the shape of the Crumb, who'd become the only decent buck we had in camp.

It was just as we was all filing out of the tent that night that the show-down comes. There was the little old buckboard from the harbor just drawing up outside, the daily vehicle that met the boats, and right away things began popping. First old Hartweed comes rushing in, plumb frantic about Catlin, and behind him is a stranger that the buckboard had brought up, a cool, alert customer with a hard gray eye and one hand in his pocket.

Catlin is leaning against a tent-pole. For about half a minute the two of them look each other over. The agent knows his man—there's no two ways about Catlin.

I never could tell just what happened next. It was all due to a little fumbling move of Conny's hand. In the stress of the moment, my swaddy, who'd never been known to tote an iron, makes a play to draw—he was just that nervous. There was a quick yell of warning from me, and in the latter part of the same second the sleuth-hound lets go a shot, thinking he's saving himself.

Old Hartweed had been mighty quick there at the last. We could see this much before the smoke cleared. Fact is, Hartweed had seen the game before any of us, and jumped in to save his lamb, paying for an eternal pew in Walhalla. Although the aim was right enough, the gent that come down from Palangoa to get my swaddy got the wrong man.

THERE was a long, still time back in the meeting-tent. If you ever come out of the small end of a cane-juice toot, you know how a man's nerves can crawl him.

We had to take the Crumb in hand right there. The gasoline torches on the tent-poles flared in the night breeze, casting jumping shadows over the company and the still form lying there in the aisle. I knew how the Crumb felt. That little parson was a real man, broadcloth and all. It was Blinky Gile who comes over to Catlin and lays a hand on his shoulder.

"Conny, old mustang," says he, "you're all shot to pieces. The bar's down at the Spotlight now. If you need a hypo—"

The Crumb arose.

"Drink, is it?" says he. "Look a-there!"—pointing to the body of old Hartweed. "That's what me and the drink did. Bli' me, if I ever sully my soul with another super, I 'ope Gawd'll knock my head off with green coconuts."

And with that he busts out through the tent-flap and bears away in the dark, breathing black and savage.

CATLIN and I were sitting out in front of the Kanaka woman's hutch where we bunked. It was early in the evening; a bulging old grain-sack of a moon was just topping the jungle trees, everything hushed and listening in the tropic night. After that shooting affair at the meeting-tent, the two of us had got our paste-boards at the mill, and all that day we'd been leaning about town, waiting for something to turn up—anything. Supper over, we'd come out in front to sit a spell.

There was no more Palamala for us, no swamping job, and no rival mill full of rum-hounds. The past was all blotted out. We were up against the hard stone wall of the future again. But we were glad. It was just like that other day, not so far back, in Manila. Yes, she was calling again, she was—the old wallaby, and we were letting her wile.

Lord, didn't I know what was working in the back of the Crumb's head, as he sat there silent, his second dobie down to butts, glowing red in the dusk? And didn't I appreciate the holding he had done the last two days, him all burned dry and jerky?

Yes, that was all past, and we were listening to "Over the Hills" again—to something beyond the gum-trees, off there by the Southern Cross. The whimper of the Kanaka woman's kid inside the hutch added something to it all. We was going to roll—we knew it, each of us, but neither made a squeak. Somehow we couldn't.

There lay the road—palms up, all white and filmy in the moonlight, a-beckoning to us again. Together we stared off down that road stretching away to the south, and the soft night-wind puffed in our ears. Out of the tail of my eye I could see the Crumb shuffling the soles of his feet, aching to try out the metal of that road. Finally he works a sentence up out of the profundities of the gloom.

"Dust-devilish damned road," he says, lovingly. "I love her tonight like a Moro loves murder."

There was another silence. We stuck in it like mud. Then the Crumb reaches over and taps something beside the low stoop, and a cheery, familiar ring heaves back. It was that blooming fry-pan, riding atop the swag-pile. That blasted little wagtail, he'd had his kit done up all evening and never let out a peep. Me? I didn't have anything but what was on my back, and didn't want anything.

"It's southerly, bound southerly, for us, I'm thinking," says I, simple.

He pulls a packet of newspapers out of the swag-pile, splits it in two, and hands me half, in the good old way.

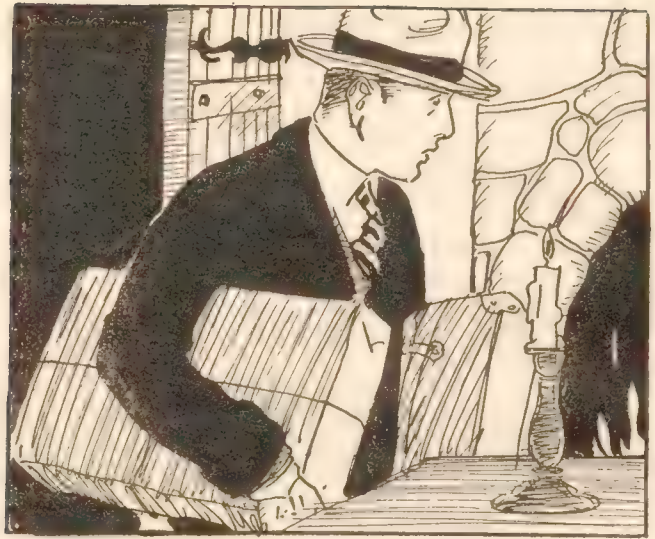
"Avast with your sheets there," says he. "We tents out tonight on the ol' campground, eh, swaddy?"

Next thing, he had scooped up his swag and shouldered it, and we was sliding.

"'Bout ship, port y'helm!" he chuckles as we hit the grain of that road, and we was off in the good old way, each taking a rut the wagons had left, and the Crumb flapping the sole of his off-shoe that was always loose.

YES sir, we was rolling once more, the two of us together. Come hell or hail-stones, or fair or stormy weather, we were off, all stuns'ls set. You of the cities, who take your meals and your yearly round of pleasures as a matter of course, like the hair on your heads—you should know that freedom of two good mates who throw in together in a strange land. Maybe she'd be all dust and no drink this time, but who was we to worry and corrugate our brows? Forward we clumped it, padding fondly the dust of her, swinging our hats in our hands in the old joyous way—the old, old lure of Just Over Yonder, that has called men out since time began, to track new roads unto the end.

Where to? Who could tell? Maybe this time we'd hit the Lemonade Springs.



The False Dawn

A Three-part Novel

(What Has Already Happened:)

THIS is a story of high explosives—of the hundred-odd cases of dynamite stolen by the Reds under Soblovski, and hidden, until their plan was ripe, near the steel-mill town of Pleasant Valley. It is the story, too, of the mental T. N. T. ready to explode from the collision of five strong-willed people at violent cross-purposes.

There was young Captain Teddy Hardwick, who had inherited the mills at Pleasant Valley, and who came back from the war with two wounds, and a broken-off love affair with a hospital nurse who had left him only a sapphire ring and no address. Hardwick came back to find a strike imminent at the mills, and he hadn't improved the situation by knocking down an ex-pugilist radical the first day.

There was Betty Hardwick, whom Captain Ted found engaged to a young man known as Endicott, who hadn't worn khaki, and who seemed employed in the unambitious work of librarian and amanuensis to old Senator Baxter.

And there was Endicott, whose real name was Ward, and whose job as librarian was merely an excuse for his pres-

ence in Pleasant Valley as an agent of the Department of Justice on the track of Soblovski. There were other things about Ward: he had himself invented a high explosive that had killed thousands in the war; he had, too, once killed a man in a little upstairs room, with his bare hands.

There was also the nurse who had given Hardwick the ring—and who turned up in America and obtained a position from Morrison, chief of the Secret Service, and who as Madame Celeste, wearing a wig and make-up, opened a fortune-telling parlor in Pleasant Valley. . . .

Ward picked up Soblovski's trail. It led him one night to watch from a roof-top the movements of a man apparently making a clock-bomb in the house opposite. There was a sudden cry of alarm; the room went dark—and Ward somehow got down the face of the building to the earth and broke into a run. . . . The explosions were beginning now.

Hardwick refused to accept Ward as Becky's fiancé because Ward had not worn khaki; and Ward refused to explain his war-work—voyaging back and forth in the coal bunkers of transports to watch for bombs. Hardwick learned that Becky had procured a marriage license; fearing

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By BRANDON CATHEWE

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an elopement, he planned to kidnap her at a masked ball and imprison her in a fishing lodge. Becky discovered the scheme and changed costumes for the ball with Madame Celeste.

CHAPTER XXV

WARD, upon leaving the Hardwick office, tramped about aimlessly and hazily. That ring! Coming out of the past in this fashion, out of Hardwick's pocket! Irony, making sport of them both, for it was clear that Hardwick's star was shining as obliquely as his own! He was afraid to approach Hardwick again—not for his own sake, but for Becky's. The puzzle would have to be solved through Becky.

A dull fury pervaded him, a fury which had no horizon, apparently. It was directed at himself, at the world, at the infinite. To have gone to Hardwick, when the simplest and only logical course would have been to put the affair into Becky's hands!

Becky! Ward took his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. It was not the sweat of exertion, but that of agony. Becky,

who hadn't harmed anyone, to break her heart and fill her mind with an abiding horror!

Becky herself opened the door to admit him. She did not notice the extreme pallor of his face, but she sensed something wrong in the icy coldness of his hands.

"How cold your hands are!"

"It comes from my soul, Becky."

"Come into the library; there's a fire. You saw Teddy?"

"Yes."

She pulled him into the library, which was unlighted save for the wood fire. She swung two chairs toward the grate. Stupid with misery, he watched these manifestations of good-will.

WITH a brave smile—there was an inexplicable terror knocking at her heart now, for she could see his face—she indicated one of the chairs. But Ward shook his head. Suddenly he put his hands on her shoulders, stared into her eyes, then bent and reverently kissed her forehead. An odd little chill ran over Becky: the kiss had nothing lovely in it; indeed, it was not unlike Teddy's salute the night he went to war.

"Sit down, Becky." She obeyed readily, even gratefully. "I wish to stand, to walk about. And please do not interrupt me until I have done. Your brother is right, to a certain extent. I'm a blackguard—though God knows I did not mean to be. Your brother started to kill me to-night; and from his point of view, he would have been perfectly justified."

There was another woman! The blood in Becky's throat nearly suffocated her; and while her throat was hot, the flesh of her body became as cold as ice. Becky was young. Her blood was at the high tide of youth. And at this moment her instincts were all female. She could forgive anything, everything, but another woman.

"All my life," began Ward, "I've been a poor, blind, scientific grub. I did not know that there was a world or that there was such a thing as woman—until I met you. Then I drifted along on the only pleasant stream I'd ever known; I heard no warnings until it was too late. Becky, I have killed a man, secretly in the night. In law I am a murderer. I killed a thorough blackguard in cold blood, with these bare hands. With cold and precise calculations, I drew this man within reach of my hands, and killed him. And yet, even in this hour, my conscience does not trouble me in the least. I trod on the head of a venomous viper; that is all I can feel. I have deceived you! and that is where my conscience speaks."

Becky understood what the matter was. She had fallen asleep, and this was only a nightmare. But how distinct Arthur's voice was!

"It is the thought of you. As the world looks upon it, I had no right to win your love; I was outside the pale, brother to Cain. It was only your brother's attitude toward me that opened my eyes to the wrong I was doing you. Understand me, my own opinions are unalterable; I cannot turn them about any more than they can turn about Gibraltar. The killing of that blackguard has never agitated my conscience, either with fear or with remorse. But I forgot that to live in this topsyturvy world, one must obey certain laws to keep this side of chaos. Until I met you, I felt myself aloof and unconcerned. When your brother put his hands on my throat, I let go. I wanted to be quit of it all. Cowardly? I don't know. But the thought of you came to us both in time."

She heard his voice coming from different parts of the room as he went on with his tragic story. And all through the telling, while she heard clearly, she understood but one fact: that there was no other woman. The true sense of what she heard did not close in upon her until later. For the present it was enough that Arthur Endicott Ward loved Becky Hardwick and nobody else. When his voice came no more, she sat motionless in her chair, strangely and weirdly happy.

Silence. By and by she became aware that there was something wrong with this silence. She sprang up, only to find that Ward had gone.

WARD, sensitive to bewildering emotions, went forth into the night, leaving his hat behind. The incredible relief of this moment! The lightness of his step that should have lagged! He had given up Becky, and there was no depression, only an unutterable sense of freedom! Analysis found an impenetrable, insurmountable wall. He had given up Becky, and the reaction was a state of exultation! He missed the basic cause—that there are some secrets that must be told, that Fate inexorably wills shall be told.

The whirligig he was riding stopped its dizzy gyrations when he stumbled over Micky Monahan—the ex-soldier boy who had undertaken to help him in his work against the Reds—asleep on the doormat of the apartment. The sight of the boy steadied Ward. He stooped and shook Monahan gently. The boy got up groggily.

"Gee! I was asleep!"

"Come in and sit down, Micky. You have some news?"

"Ye-ah. That dope roosts on the second floor. You can get to it by the fire-escape. Kid Griffen was with him tonight. I couldn't hear much, but there was somethin' about 'leven o'clock."

"Eleven o'clock!" The transition was instant and automatic: the secret agent absorbed the man. Eleven o'clock!

"I dope it out that them bugs is goin' to blow up the mills at 'leven some night."

"What does this Soblovski look like?"

"I'll say he'd be some guy with the Janes. Janes are funny. They falls for guys like this dope. I dunno why. Whata yuh want me to do next?" asked Monahan eagerly.

"Watch this Griffen; keep your eye on him all day. Take a peek into his locker.

Note if he brings in any bundle besides his lunch-box. It will be a clock-bomb. Take no one into your confidence, and report here tomorrow night."

"Yes sir."

DESPITE his promise to his chief Morrison, Ward was determined to continue the game. It was no longer humanly possible for him to sit still and twiddle his thumbs. Excitement—he must have it, no matter to what end it brought him.

"Monahan, I want you to watch Captain Hardwick too."

"What?" This was a bark.

"He is ill, Micky, and not accountable for all his acts."

"Where d'yuh get that stuff?" Monahan demanded indignantly. "Sick, your gran'ma! No sick man carries a punch like he give Griffen."

"It's in his head, Micky—some after-math of his wourds. He can't control his temper. Would he have struck Griffen in the old days? Wouldn't he have laughed that crowd away? Griffen simply demanded to know who the Captain was, and the Captain struck. I tell you, Micky, he is ill. So watch over him as much as you can. He probably thinks more of you than any other man alive, and he'll listen to you."

"Ol' Dynamite, losin' his grip? Gee, that's tough! An' he don't know it?"

"No. So watch over him as much as you can."

"Hell!" said Monahan, moodily. "An' them bohunks will be layin' for him at the Alhambra. They're up to somethin'; dunno what. Looks as if Ol' Dynamite was goin' to need all his friends. Flooie in the belfry! I can't get that. But you oughta know. Will you be there?"

"In the crowd somewhere."

"All right. Ol' Angus McClure an' me'll be in the front row; an' nobody'll get the Captain's goat if we can stop it. I'll take care o' the Kid's locker. An' what'll I do if I find a bum?"

"Take it into the open, by the coal-pile, warn everybody, and send for me. Don't put it in water. They are making them now to explode in water—to kill the discoverer."

"The skunks! Say, but this is great! I aint had nothin' to do so long! Had I oughta carry a gun?"

"Never in this world! I want you to get information."

"All right." But Monahan secretly decided to carry the Browning he had brought home as a war relic. "Good night, sir."

Monahan gone, Ward trifled with his pipes, but did not light one: he picked up a book, but after riffling the pages, laid it down. . . . Soblovski, cornered, would be dangerous. Who could say what might happen if he placed his hand on the rogue's shoulder?

He was tired, inconceivably tired. He sat down and rested his head on his arms. Why had he told Becky, when it would have been far wiser simply to vanish?

There came a light rap on the door. He was only half conscious of the sound. It was repeated briskly. He rose wearily. Monahan had forgotten something, probably. But as he swung open the door, he beheld Becky.

CHAPTER XXVI

IT was a pale Becky; but her eyes were clear and steady, and there hovered about her lips the shadow of a smile, a smile born of pity and tenderness, of woman-love and maternal.

"I did not know you had gone until I turned. You might have waited to hear what I had to say."

"What could you say, Becky?"

"That we Hardwicks never run away from trouble—that we stick." She made a little gesture as she came into the room; it was a rather despairing gesture. "Perhaps I'm wrong too, Arthur. I mean, maybe I'm standing on my head too. But I can't shudder, I can't dig up a grain of horror. On the contrary, I feel—glad! The low beast! Such men ought to die."

"But that doesn't eliminate the halter."

"You poor befuddled boy! There isn't a jury in the world that wouldn't acquit you with the verdict of justifiable homicide. And that's why I am here."

"What?"

"You must go back to Washington, Arthur, and give yourself up. When you tell your story, tell it exactly as you told it to me. We may never marry, Arthur; but there will never be anybody else. Why, I should despise Teddy if, in such a case, he didn't act just as you did."

"I'm a blackguard in his eyes, nevertheless."

"You wont be by tomorrow. He'll understand, when I tell him everything."

"No, no, Becky; you mustn't say anything to your brother!"

"But I've got to tell him—to protect you both! Don't you see? Otherwise he may not think of me the next time you two meet. . . . I must have been a dreadfully naughty little girl," she broke off irrelevantly.

"What?"—blankly.

"To find myself between two such grindstones—all my beautiful castles rocking and tumbling about my ears."

"God forgive me, Becky!" Ward sat down again and once more laid his head on his arms. "God forgive me!"

"We both of us forgive you—because we understand." She put her hand on his head. "Will you return to Washington and face it?"

"Yes."

"And then—will you come back to me?" Ward looked up.

"You believe they will acquit me?"

"Assuredly. There are human instincts which no man-made laws may put in bounds; and juries always sympathize with them."

"Ah, if it had been in hot blood, Becky! But it was premeditated. I worked it out as I would have worked out a problem in my laboratory, coldly and precisely. I'm afraid no jury can overlook that. I promise, whether they imprison me or let me go. I still feel as I have always felt—that I ground in the head of a venomous snake. Besides, they never could trace it to me."

She smiled sadly. "See what it is doing to you, to me! No, Arthur: no man can go through life with such a secret hidden in his heart. You deny the canker, but it goes on eating into your vitals just the same. Teddy and I will be back of you through it all."

"When my work here is done, I'll return to Washington. And I believed there was a great place in this world for me—when God gave me nothing but the part of a fool!"

"Who knows but this is an interlude to test us out? Good-by. Will you kiss me, Arthur?"

"I'd better not. I feel pretty ragged just now."

"Please!"

Perhaps it was Becky's tears; perhaps it was the thought that he might never see her again. He suddenly flung his arms around her and stifled her with the despair

of that last kiss. Then he pushed her into the hall.

It never occurred to either how the world would look upon this innocent visit. But it occurred to the watcher across the way. He chuckled. An anonymous note to the brother: that would be a capital joke. He waited until Becky's runabout rolled away from the curb; then he lit a cigarette and sauntered off.

EDWARD—the Hardwick butler—was always up and about by half after six. He was profoundly astonished to discover Becky asleep on the hall lounge. He touched her shoulder, but she did not respond. Then he shook her. Becky opened her eyes rebelliously. It took her a minute to recall how she had come upon the lounge.

"Good gracious! Edward, did Teddy come in last night? I was waiting up for him."

"I haven't knocked on his door yet, Miss Becky."

"Never mind. I'll find out for myself."

Then she reflected that if Teddy had come in, he had not seen her. So she ran upstairs and boldly opened the door to Teddy's room. The bed had not been touched. Becky's knees grew weak. Supposing Arthur and Teddy had met again! She sat down on the bed until the vertigo passed. Then she drew the telephone extension toward her. She called Torrence. No; Teddy had not spent the night there.

"Torrence, then something dreadful has happened!"

"Fudge! What could happen?"

She got around this question by explaining Teddy's ragged mental condition.

"You women! There's nothing the matter with Teddy. He may have spent the night at the club or at a hotel. I'll call them up. Keep your hair on. He'll turn up all right."

Becky then called Ward. There was no answer—and all her terror returned. Teddy might listen to her, but he would never listen to Arthur. God wasn't understandable: to torture her thus, when she had always played a game straight! Sobs bubbled into her throat, but she shut her teeth.

What a pother our imaginations are always getting us into! We imagine the worst; and if it doesn't happen, how we tongue-lash the tardy one for disappoint-

ing us! Thus, when Torrence called up from the office and informed Becky that Teddy had driven out into the country somewhere and that there was a note for her at the office, her anxiety became fury, which she expended upon her hair, her clothes, her breakfast and the steering-wheel of her roadster as she drove it to the office. That was the way with men: they never thought of anybody but themselves. The idea of not telephoning her!

Hardwick's note was a scrawl of threats. If she ever mentioned that blackguard again, her brother would leave the house:

I nearly killed him last night. He came to me with a ring. He could make love to you with another woman in the back-ground! Damn him! You, Becky Hardwick! I can't get it. Why, an ordinary kitchen-wench would have shown more sense. Well, you have my ultimatum. And you might drop your lover a broad hint to duck when he sees me.

The note, the desk and the office receded through a film of burning tears. Becky saw her world crumble and become ashes.

There are many gates to the Garden of Bitter Apples—Gethsemane; and human beings are eternally wandering in there because our greatest weakness lies in jumping at conclusions. Hardwick had, on returning to the office, written down "this Endicott fellow" as the man who had broken the life of the woman he, Hardwick, loved. And what doubled his fury and pain was the knowledge that he dared not trust himself to seek out the blackguard and question him. So, after writing his threatening note to Becky, he got into his car and sped furiously into the country, drawing up, somewhere around dawn, at a roadhouse he had frequented in his careless youth. He remained here all day.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE Alhambra had in its time served many purposes. Originally it had been built as a roller-skating rink. There was a small stage at one end. This stage saved the building from becoming a covered lumberyard. Bands and politicians and *Hamlets* with original ideas regarding the Melancholy Dane held forth at odd times; occasionally there was a charity ball; and annually the local amateurs murdered Gilbert and Sullivan. So

much for the past. Nowadays you went to public dances or to prize-fights.

It was in this hall that Micky Monahan had won his first fistic battle. Many a time the cheers had reverberated against the roof as he had climbed through the ropes, coming or going. Tonight, sitting in the row next to the stage, at the meeting of the mill workmen summoned by Hardwick, his elbow touching Angus McClure's, Monahan felt his Adam's apple pumping strangely. Down and out, through no fault of his own! The wound that prevented the ex-service man from going back to his pre-war career as a prize-fighter—it hit him harder now than at any other time. Down and out, when he had had a good chance to break into the champion class and the big money!

"Gee!" he said aloud, unthinkingly.

"What's that, lad?" asked McClure, turning.

"I was thinkin' about the good ol' days when I carried the K. O. in both mitts."

"I see. You were a game lad, and it's a dom shame the Dutchman got you. Many's the time I've trod on my corns stomping for you. Me and Bobby! You'll be remembering my son Bobby?"

"Sure! Say, he was a tough guy in a scrap. He was always tryin' to see if he couldn't get two on his bay'nut at once. Ye-ah."

"That would be him."

"Always singin', too, about some skirt by the name o' Bessie Dundee. Say, whata they goin' to hand the Captain?" Monahan asked anxiously.

"I don't know, lad. They're too dom quiet for me. I'd like a little more good-natured rumpus. I don't like that bunch behind us. Griffen and his gang of radicals are going to spring something nasty, if they have the chance."

IN the gallery, which ran around three sides of the hall, sat Becky and Torrence. In the gallery opposite sat another woman, all alone, and veiled. Becky idly wondered who she was. A great cloud of blue tobacco-smoke was filling the hall. Becky coughed.

"Looks like a fight-night, Becky," said Torrence. "Several hundred of the boys here. And plenty of policemen."

"What do the men want, Torrence?"

"God knows! They don't!"

"And if they go out?"

"No profits for Hardwick & Co. this

year. Only losses. Depreciation of stock. Cancellation of orders. Bankruptcy, possibly. I'm fixed, and so is your brother. But that isn't it. It isn't the money; it's carrying on a fine business, a business that gave Pleasant Valley its leg up, brought other manufacturers here—prosperity, thousands of homes."

Torrence inspected his watch. "Quarter to eight. Some wag suggested that attendance ought to be considered as time and a half for overtime. There he is, Becky! A good boy! Grinning, darn him! His old grandfather's grin to a dot! . . . Damn them, why don't they give him a hand?"

THERE was a little spatter of hand-clapping, but its feebleness only accentuated the general chilliness of the men.

A stage-hand came out with a black-board which he set directly behind Hardwick. A laugh ran about the hall.

"What's this—night-school?" some one jeered.

"Teacher! Teacher!"

"What's the answer?"

"Draw us a picture!"

One of the reporters leaned across the deal table and spoke to a comrade. "Keep your eye peeled. This is going to be one big night. If ever a man needed nerve, it's Hardwick. If he can pull through the baiting and heckling he's in for without losing that smile, he can have anything he wants in Pleasant Valley. I wouldn't be in his brogans for a million dollars."

Becky, her heart swollen with unhappiness, watched her brother keenly as he stepped to the footlights. Was yonder man really Teddy? Hadn't some stranger taken his shape, an impostor? Teddy, who used to be so gentle and good-humored, threatening her and refusing to hear her side! Teddy, planning to abduct her and hide her in the woods! What had happened to the world of yesterday?

"Ladies an' gents!" boomed a voice.

Laughter and a scuffling of feet; this died away shortly.

"One night in the Argonne—" began Hardwick; and there followed half a dozen war stories which touched the comic side. He recounted these stories exceptionally well, for he had always been a capital yarn-spinner. He used the vernacular; few were the men in the hall who failed to understand him.

The men laughed; they had to; for the

American wage-earner has a sound sense of humor when his local union isn't prodding him with the goad of rebellion. Moreover there were men in the hall who had taken part in these tales. And there were fathers and brothers of some who would never more return. Hardwick had thus adroitly got home a comfortable wedge for the Big Talk.

"I am here tonight with the hand of friendship, of good-will and coöperation," he went on to say presently. "I am going to draw a picture, as well as I am able, of your happy state as compared with that of the workers in Europe. You read in the newspapers of how the English pound, the French franc, the Italian lire and the German mark have gone down, and will stay down for a long time to come. But do you men realize what it signifies? That shortly we cannot afford to sell abroad, and that our products will be for home consumption. South America will not save us. To keep going, we must have the European markets. The result will be flurries of panics, shutdowns, failures. The profits of capital and the wages of labor are at a false standard. Shortly the profits of capital will shrink below pre-war times. But will labor consent to see its wages curtailed? It will not. The inevitable will be panics. But it is possible for some of us to weather this approaching storm. All we have got to do is to get together, have a real understanding. You expect me to trust you. On your side, you ought to trust me. An honest endeavor to get together instead of trying to cut each other's throats."

He paused to take a drink of water.

"Water, water, everywhere, and not a drop to drink!" he said.

THE men laughed again. They remembered that Hardwick had often "hit it up" in the pre-war days. They were warming toward him, and the malcontents recognized the danger. The heckling began in earnest. But through it all Hardwick presented his smile. He had a ready answer for every question; often he turned it to the discomfort of the questioner. He saw that the heckling came from one quarter only—two or three rows from the stage.

Now came the point where he intended to demonstrate some facts upon the black-board: how the money came in, where it went, the continuous loss by wear and

tear. But his back was no sooner turned than an object sailed across the footlights and spattered on the blackboard. A tomato.

Instantly Angus McClure was upon his feet. "You dirty scuts! Who threw that? I'll bash his face in if I find out. You low-lived skunks! When he's trying to meet you fair. The man who threw that dares not stand out!"

Hardwick wiped the spatter from his cheek, coolly enough; but every vein in his body seemed to hold fluid fire. He stuffed the handkerchief into a pocket and walked down to the lights. The reporters noted that he was very pale.

"Hold on there, McClure!" he called down to the fiery Scot. "This is my job." He dropped into the orchestra pit and climbed into the aisle—filled with an anger so terrible that it choked his throat, his ears, his eyes. He held up a hand and silence fell upon the men. "To you who understand that I was offering a friendly hand, thanks for your patience. But to you down there, in the third or fourth rows—you who refuse my hand—is there a man with guts among you? Let him step out and face me! I promise to whale the everlasting daylight out of him!"

Silence—then a roar such as Monahan, even in his palmiest days, had never heard. It was heard all over the block, this rough man-roar of approval, of understanding. A fight! Half of the men rose to their feet, milling and punching each other in high spirits. The boss, coming down among them with his fists, the way tradition said his grandfather used to do! They began to sit down again, tremendously excited, craning their necks to see if the challenge would be accepted.

It was. Into the aisle appeared a man whom they recognized as Kid Griffen. He walked down to Hardwick and said with a grin: "I didn't throw the tomato; but I'm the guy you asked for!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

IT was said. It was done. There was no way back from such a challenge. Hardwick, however, wasn't thinking in this groove; he was still at the peak of his fury, everything in him clamoring for physical contact—Berserker. The moment for analysis had not arrived. He

saw before him the man who had refused his hand, one of the chief disturbers in the mills, one of whose crowd had thrown the tomato.

There was one glimmer of reason. Hardwick caught himself in time. There must be no brawl here. For himself he would have welcomed it, but there was Becky to think of.

"I thought it would be you. You threw that tomato in theory if not in fact. All right! I gave you a good punch on the jaw the other night. I offered my hand later in apology. You ignored it. Tomorrow, at noon, in the yard, you will have it offered again—shut. If you whip me, you can keep your job. But if you don't whip me, you go out so fast that the cinders will smoke under your feet!"

"That's fair enough," replied Griffen—cool because he believed he could afford to be. "Gloves or bare fists?"

"Regulation gloves. I don't purpose to break my hands on a skull as thick as yours."

"They are nice an' white, aint they?" jeered the pugilist.

Hardwick did not reply to Griffen. With a movement so quick that the pugilist could not forestall it, Hardwick seized the man by the wrists, drew them together and caught them in his left hand. There are some men who possess terrible grips; and Hardwick had been rather noted in the mills and on the campus for that left hand of his. Naturally powerful, it was reinforced by a tremendous spurt of nervous energy. Few men could wrench loose until that nervous energy slackened or was expended.

Surprised and furious, Griffen tried to twist free his wrists. He was stronger in the arms than Hardwick. He succeeded in dragging the latter along with him, but he could not break the grip. Suddenly Hardwick let go, and Griffen stumbled backward, caught and steadied himself, defensively. But Hardwick was through.

"Not so white as they might be, are they?"

A second roar shook the roof. A grudge fight!

"He shall not do it!" cried Becky, springing up. "He shall not!"

Torrence caught her arm and forced her down into the chair. "Be still!"

"But you don't understand!" Becky protested. She herself hadn't understood until this hour. "He is ill. It's the after-

math of his injuries. I tell you, it sha'n't be. That abysmal brute hitting Teddy, beating him before all those men! It sha'n't be!"

"What are you talking about? Ill? Did that handgrip look like the work of a sick man?"

"He has queer bursts of rage, Torrence. He can't help them. A temporary madness. In a few minutes he'll be sick with shame."

"But Becky, he will have to go through with it. Did you ever hear men roar like that?"

"You're a brute!" she fired back at him, on the point of tears. "I will not have it!"

"Becky, listen: That wasn't any malady. That was Grandpa Hardwick, who was a hot-headed, two-fisted man in his younger days. He's come back for a minute. Wake up! You don't understand what has happened. It's the boy's salvation, and the mills' too. All the talk in the world is wasted breath compared to what Teddy's just accomplished. He's gone down among them with the one argument they thoroughly understand—a pair of fists. I'd give a year of my life if the grand-dad could see him. Grandpa's shoes and father's shoes can be laid away with the company curios. Theodore Hardwick walks in his own. Oh, I know it!"

"But I tell you he is ill—ill—ill!" She almost shrieked it. "I say it sha'n't happen!"

"And how the devil are you going to stop it? Don't be a fool, Becky. The men wont understand. According to their lights, your brother has done what the majority of them would have done. Come along. Let's get out before the mob starts for the doors."

BECKY was not listening. There would be no fight in the yard tomorrow. She would stop the fight by appealing directly to the chief of police.

Torrence succeeded in getting her safely to her runabout, and then pressed his way back into the hall. He wanted to hug the boy.

The chief of police was absent. As a matter of fact, he was somewhere in the middle of the mob of excited men who were pushing their way out of the Alhambra. The deputy, however, was on the job. O'Brien listened attentively to Becky, but finally shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Miss Hardwick," he said; "but I can't stop that kind of a fight. There's no money up or paid admissions, and it will take place on private property. If I tried to stop it, there would be a riot. But I can promise you that I'll be there to see fair play. I shouldn't worry. Your brother is no infant, if I remember him rightly."

"But he is ill!" cried Becky in despair. "He wasn't accountable."

"You could give him a cup of coffee with something in it," suggested the deputy.

"But I daren't do that! If he found out, he would never forgive me."

"Better let it go through, then. It's a queer hold; but he's wriggled out of worse ones. I'll tell you something. If there is a big strike at the mills, we police will be in for a whale of a job; and there will be bloodshed. Most of your men were in a wabbly state of mind, not knowing exactly which way to flop. If your brother beats Griffen, there's a good chance of his beating the strike. Better let it go through. I can show you on our books here that your brother has a lot of tricks he wouldn't naturally exhibit at the home fireside. He whipped three husky policemen one night in 1913. It didn't get into the papers, because the policemen made the boner of trying to arrest an innocent bystander. Your brother had just enough under his belt to object. He was a good sport. He came here all alone and pretty well bunged up. Said he'd beaten up three coppers and wanted to know what it would cost. To you he's probably a parlor angel; but we know him for a tough codger in a slugging match."

"It's horrible!"

"But human. And it will be good medicine to this old burg to wake up to the fact that there are still some he-men in silk shirts. Frankly, I wouldn't dare stop the fight even if I had the authority. And he'll win, when he wakes up to what hangs in the balance."

Becky's eyes filled with tears.

"You men are all beasts. You absolutely refuse to stop this fight?"

"Absolutely."

"I shall report you to the commissioner—the chief."

"They were at the Alhambra. If they believed they had the authority, they would have interfered then and there. Tomorrow night you'll be thanking me, Miss Hardwick."

She did not reply, but went out, slamming the door stormily.

CHAPTER XXIX

AFTER leaving the police-station, Becky, still resolved that the fight should not take place, drove to Senator Baxter's.

"Seen the chief of police?" asked the Senator when Becky had breathlessly concluded her plea for assistance.

"The deputy. He refused to act—wasn't anything he could touch, he said. But the mayor."

"I'll call him up." The dialogue between the Senator and the mayor was short.

"He says he can't see any way of stopping it, Becky. It's amateur. Can't stop it any more than he could stop two policemen boxing in the police gymnasium."

"But can't I get it into anybody's head that he is ill—ill?" Becky cried passionately. "If he was perfectly well and got into a muddle like this, I shouldn't have thought of interfering. But he is ill, Senator. It is horrible, because all the decency in him will rebel at the thought of going through with it. That is why I want it stopped. It isn't fair."

"Becky, I'm terribly sorry," said the Senator, visibly distressed, "but I'm afraid Teddy will have to finish it. It's the queerest mix-up I ever heard of. But ill? Why, he looks as tough and sturdy to me as ever."

"He has uncontrollable outbursts of temper, which keep getting worse each new outburst. And I am to blame, in a way. That is why I *must* stop it. He will be beaten. Think of it—water, cold water, still stings the nerves under and about the scars! What will blows do? And nobody will understand!"

Becky broke down and cried unrestrainedly. The Senator awkwardly tried to console her.

"Becky dear! . . . Damn it all! But listen. I'd give a year of my old useless life if I could get Teddy out of this, honorably. In plain English, if we pry him loose, they will call him a coward. The word will dog him to his grave. It doesn't matter that it's all wrong; it's man stuff. It's the way men will look at it; and his gallant record in France won't be worth a tinker's dam. It's human nature. But I'll

tell you what. Call up Ward. Has he told you what he ought to tell you?"

"Everything," answered Becky, taking the question as a blow. "Oh, I am so miserable! I've got to give up the man I love, Senator!"

"You mean that there's something about Ward I don't know?"—astonished.

"Yes."

"Something that isn't aboveboard?"

"Perhaps God will straighten it all out. I trust Arthur absolutely; I love him more now than ever; but there is a barrier, and only God can remove it. Oh, as for myself, I'd go to the end of the world with him at a nod. But Arthur would never nod; he isn't that kind."

"Tell me everything, Becky. Perhaps I can help."

"But it isn't my secret to tell. I feel—as if I were being torn by hot pincers. What he did was terrible, but it was just. I see it the way he does; but you would not see it that way, nor the world. It would be useless to call him up. If *you* can't stop this beastly fight, then it must go on."

"I can't do anything, my child. If ever a man had his hand thrown back in his face, Teddy had his tonight. But what the devil has this fool Ward been doing?"

Becky shook her head and slowly left the study.

THERE were no lights in the Alhambra now except over the street exit and the stage loft. Four men remained in the hall. Three of them sat in the front row and the fourth on the orchestra pit rail. This was Monahan; and he was as cheerful as a cricket in May.

"All yuh gotta do is to work his bread-basket. Never mind his jaw until yuh get that goin'. I'm goin' to handle yuh."

"And I'll be in your corner too." Angus McClure supplemented.

"Every chance in the world," went on Monahan. "They aint no bug-juice under your belt an' up to September first, Griffen piled in the rotgut every Sattidy night. He's strong an' tough, all right; but get him where he lives, an' it's curtains. Now listen. I know the game—th' amateur up against the pro. The pro wins generally, because the thought o' his bein' a professional gets th' amateur's goat before the fight starts—pool, billiards, bowlin', all alike. You didn't know who he was when

you soaked him on the jaw. You wouldn't 'a' done it if you'd known he was a heavy."

"Maybe not." Hardwick turned to Torrence. "What a hell of a hole I've poked into this trip! I've shamed Becky, and I've shamed the name of Hardwick. . . . Scrapping with a cheap pug in the mill-yard! Damn it all!"

"You should worry!" cried Monahan. "Say, did yuh ever hear how ol' John L. backed away from a society amateur in New York? Well, this lounge-lizard offered Sullivan ten thousand if he'd put on the gloves. John laughed and shook his head, because he knew that this amateur could lick him; an' he'd 'a' been a fine boob to risk his belt for ten thousand. Think o' that tomorrow, an' poke the Kid in the bread-basket. Don't let him wrastle; get out o' the clinches as soon as yuh can. He'll beat yuh at that game. I'll tip yuh when he begins to wheeze—the big stiff! What if he does spoil your map for a coupla days? He'll be ridin' freight tomorrow night; an' you'll be the next president o' th' United States!"

"Micky," said Hardwick, "you're a jewel without price. All right! I'll give that tough the worst walloping he ever had. No mercy. Anywhere I can hit him, and all I can hit him with."

MONAHAN suddenly bent forward. "Some one comin' down th' aisle. A white collar. Mebbe it's the janitor."

It was the Rector from St. Paul's.

"I just heard," said the Rector, out of breath.

"That I am going to uphold the honor of the Hardwicks by knocking the block off a pugilist?" asked Hardwick ironically as he held out his hand.

"Can you get out of it honorably?"

"No. I'd be a yellow dog all the rest of my days; and I'm fond of this old burg."

"I thought if I spoke to the man he might apologize."

"The point is, I started the ball rolling. Some one chucked a ripe tomato at me, and I blew up. Simple as that."

"Some one threw a tomato at you? When you came here with the hand of friendship?"

"Exactly. When I came here to see if I couldn't avert a strike by laying all the company cards on the table. Oh, the bulk of the men were all right. I ought to have kept my head; but I blew up."

"Sometimes, you know, a little straight talk can clean up affairs like this. But a tomato!"

"Large and over-ripe. Griffen did not throw it, but he represented the man who did."

"That changes the complexion. Still, it's an ugly mess."

"Rector," interposed Torrence, "if Teddy should back out, the men would fall away like leaves in autumn. Psychology! The strike would assume formidable proportions. Anything might happen. Teddy isn't fighting for himself, but for Pleasant Valley and all the decent things Pleasant Valley stands for. You know human nature. You wouldn't want the last Hardwick called yellow."

"Alas! Eternal warfare, individually and collectively, when a little talk would bring about a better understanding! But don't misjudge this cloth. I would not now see you back down for all the sewing-circles on earth. Good luck!"

"Well, say," said Monahan in an awed whisper as the Rector's back disappeared in the gloom.

BECKY acted exactly as the Senator advised. She met Teddy at the door, threw her arms around him and kissed him. She never knew how near this burst of sisterly tenderness brought him to the breaking-point.

"Can you do it?"

"I'm going to try, old girl. A rotten mess. I'm sorry; but I've got to go through with it."

"Here," she said, handing him an object. "Carry this in your pocket tomorrow for luck."

"Good girl!" he said, with a little laugh.

The object was the grandfather's silver spectacle-case.

Both were ill at ease, however, and were anxious to be alone. Both secretly feared that the other subject might pop up disastrously.

"I'm all in," he said. "Good night."

She gave him a pat on the shoulder as he passed.

CHAPTER XXX

PLEASANT VALLEY looked the same the next morning—that is, the town occupied the same geographical boundaries, and the men went to their

offices and shops and the women to their washtubs or boudoirs. But Lord love you!—no pot ever boiled and seethed and bubbled as did Pleasant Valley folk that late September morning.

In the offices half the men were sure that Hardwick had been "lit up;" if not, then he was crazy. In the shops men called him a good sport, but hoped Kid Griffen would knock his block off.

The police and the agents of the Department of Justice, however, had caught the psychology. If the fight was allowed to proceed, there were nine chances in ten that the strike, if called, would fail. The millhands would hesitate before deserting a man who was as ready with a closed hand as he was with an open one.

The *Morning Post* carried an eight-column head—war type. There was an editorial. Win or lose his fight, Hardwick could go to the State capitol if he wanted to. The *Post* stood ready to back him.

MORRISON, the chief agent from the Department of Justice, sat down. "You sent for me?"

"Yes," said Madame Celeste. "This fight must not take place."

In his long career he had come into contact with many women, but this one topped the lot. It wasn't because she was beautiful or had once sat among the mighty. What fascinated him was her natural guilelessness as against the acquired guile of her calling. Rooking the bumpkins and feeling sorry for them! Where another woman would have sunk, lost caste beyond hope, this one had only been disillusioned. Varady must have had some queer hold over her, for it did not seem possible she would have bent to that scoundrel's will otherwise.

"Why must it be stopped?" he asked.

"Because Captain Hardwick is ill. I was there last night. His actions were not normal—I mean the way he spoke, the way he seized the pugilist's wrists. I've always been wondering. It did not seem possible that he should come through without some after-effects. Under normal conditions he would not have acted thus."

"What he did was perfectly normal to me, to the other men who witnessed it."

"No. Remember, I was with him for three months. There was something wrong there last night. It isn't in the man to act like that, normally. You must stop it."

"How?"

"I have heard indirectly about Griffen. It would be very easy for you to have him locked up."

"I shall not lift a finger," said the agent tranquilly.

"You refuse?"

"POSITIVELY—as an agent from the Department, as a practiced psychologist. The Department wants no strike in Pleasant Valley. A queer thing has happened, if indeed Hardwick is ill as you say. But Hardwick must go through with it, because the majority of the men have suddenly veered about in his favor. If I arrested Griffen, Hardwick would be accused of having instigated the arrest. The men would desert him to a man. That's the psychology of it. There's a chance of the storm blowing over."

"But a sick man! Oh, that is brutal! His poor scarred body! He is a miracle. I have seen men less injured who are now helpless. It doesn't seem possible for a human being to stand up the way he did last night, after what he has gone through."

"I remember now. You came here on his account."

"Well?"

"I beg your pardon!"

"There is no need to do that." Her eye met his sustainedly. "Your thought is quite correct, I wanted to help him, and I believe the hour has arrived."

"Stop a moment. Suppose I agree to put Griffen out of the way, and Hardwick learned that you were back of the adventure. He would despise you."

"What he thinks, or would think, of me is of no matter. It is what I think of him."

"To save a man from actual death only to thrust him into a living one! That is what you wish to do. And I forbid you to make the least effort to interfere with what seems to me the will of God. He will have to go through with it."

"So be it. But if anything happens to him, I shall hold you accountable."

"I accept the risk. Do you ever expect to meet him?"

"No."

"You're a mighty fine woman. . . . You—you have permitted an idea to hypnotize you. Stamp it out."

"What idea?"

"That you are not good enough for Captain Hardwick. . . . Good morning."

CHAPTER XXXI

NOON. The men began to pour out of the mills and shops into the yard—quietly. There was little jostling; there was no hurry for ringside vantage, little talk above the ordinary tone. And yet there was not a man among them who was not in a state of tremendous excitement.

In the suppressed and orderly manner in which they gathered about the ring there was an element of awe. This awe was based upon the fact that the young man who would in the future control the destinies of Hardwick & Co. was about to demonstrate that he was two-fisted like themselves. Taking on, without batting an eye, the strongest man in the mills, next to Angus McClure! Only a he-man would have had the nerve.

Monahan, with assistance, had worked all the forenoon setting the posts and roping them in—paraphernalia he had borrowed from the Alhambra Boxing Club. He had found a fine clay bottom near the great coke- and coal-piles. He had also commandeered the services of a referee who was known for his squareness and his quick eye. Monahan purposed that the fight should proceed upon the established rules of the game. In a rough-and-tumble, Old Dynamite would be no match for Griffen.

Hardwick and the pugilist entered the ring at the same time, from opposite sides. Monahan had seen to this also. The Captain wasn't going to do any waiting; his goat was going to stay exactly where it was, where Monahan could cajole it. Griffen had demurred, but Monahan had coldly threatened to expose him.

It was a gray day, and Monahan was glad of that. In the sun the Kid would be likely to outgeneral the Captain. While the latter was a far better boxer than the Kid, and carried as good a punch, the professional had the advantage of long ring experience; a bagful of tricks no amateur could possibly acquire in gymnasiums, even under the tutelage of as crafty a ring-general as Bob Fitzsimmons.

The referee called the men to the center of the ring and went through the ancient rigmarole of explaining the break. Neither Hardwick nor Griffen offered hands. The Kid carried his ring grin, however, while Hardwick's face was a puzzle to everyone but Monahan. Many a time he had

seen that impassive expression in France, at zero hour. Good boy! Not afraid of anything that walked on two feet or four. Pan him in the newspaper, would they? All right. Before this scrap was over, these guys would see a Man! Teddy! Oh, boy, any guy with that monaker!

The Kid threw off his bathrobe and exhibited his heavy and muscular torso. But below his ribs was a convexity, a danger-sign to any man. Fat.

"All right?" whispered the happy Monahan.

Hardwick laughed. Not at Monahan's question, but at the cold realization of where he was and what he was about to do. Breeding rebelled; common sense, everything in him seemed to be curdled with disgust. To put himself on the level of that brute yonder—to have played into his hands! To exhibit his poor scarred body to these callous if interested eyes! To have shamed Becky! And there hadn't been a loophole to crawl out of. What the devil was Fate going to do with him, before she let him go? For he was only a poor puppet in this affair; he was not here by any wish of his own. Fury, that he could not get hold of until too late! He heard Monahan talking.

"Remember. Keep pokin' your mitts into that hog-fat. Don't bother his jaw until he puffs. Keep away from him; waltz him, anythin' to get his wind. You gotta lick him. He thinks you're goin' to be easy, an' you know he isn't. That's th' edge yuh got on him. Use your dome. Make out to yourself he's one o' them Jerry's you usta chase."

"All right, Micky."

MONAHAN pulled away Hardwick's robe. At the sight of those pink puckery scars, a gasping sigh swept over the men. Murmurs followed. This did not look like a square deal. It did not matter how game Hardwick was, this did not look like fair play.

Another point that they recognized for the first time: Hardwick was no newspaper hero; those scars marked him for the real article. The spines of many grew cold as they visualized what had happened over there in France. Many of them choked. They had read about these things; frequency of reading had dulled the imagination; but they saw yonder a fellow-townsmen who had gone down to death and returned, for this America they were dis-

satisfied with. Underneath, the average laboring man is sound and honest; he has merely been bemused by too much talk. The innate chivalry in him rose up. They did not want to see this fight now.

Angus McClure held up his hand, signaling the timekeeper not to call time just yet. He crossed the ring to Griffen's corner.

"Do you see that, man?"

Griffen nodded.

"There's a great chance here for you to be a man. Go over and apologize and call it off. You heard that murmur. The men will be for you. We like fair play here, and this is murder. No man with a body like that is fit."

"The row is of his own makin'. If he wants it stopped, let him say so." Griffen spat.

"You base-born scut!"

Griffen laughed. "Oh, don't worry. It wont last more than two rounds. I wont hurt him much. One good poke is all I need—just reg'lar. Now, mosey back to your corner."

Kid Griffen was the abysmal brute; he typified all that is unclean in pugilism, as Monahan typified all that is decent. No trick was too low or despicable, if the Kid thought he could win by it. Provided there was enough money, he was ready to play both ends from the middle. His career was shaded by dozens of frame-ups; and because of this, the boxing commissions had barred him from appearing in New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

He never lost a chance to foul, if he believed the referee could not see. With his elbow or the heel of his glove he could work outrageous damage in a break. It did not count how much the seconds or the spectators shouted; the referee had to see the foul; and Griffen always turned the trick while his opponent's back was toward the third man in the ring.

When he saw those terrible scars on Hardwick's torso, he grew exultant. An ordinary man would have been stirred to pity. Not Griffen. He hated Hardwick bitterly. So then, when he saw those honorable scars, he made up his mind to play upon them, openly, to draw his gloves down across them in the breaks, slyly to use his elbow. Meanwhile, to batter that clean-cut face into a pulp. Nothing would satisfy him but to see Hardwick carried helpless to the locker-room.

Instinctively he sensed that the men were

now with Hardwick sentimentally; and for the secret and desperate game he was playing, the men must be swung away again. Hardwick, beaten and humiliated, could not expect to hold the fealty of his men. So Griffen realized that he must beat up Hardwick for political purposes as well as for personal.

Griffen had one misfortune; his passions always ran into his face. Monahan knew him tolerably well.

"Mind, no high-brow stuff with that guy," he warned Hardwick. "Fight him with his own stuff. He'll foul all day, if he thinks he can get by with it. An' keep out o' the clinches."

"Micky, I'll have to figure it out and go it on my own."

THE bell rang. Hardwick took a dozen steps from his corner and paused. He was smiling—smiling because he knew he was stark, raving mad!—in the middle of some abominable nightmare!

"Look out!" yelled Monahan, filled with despairing wonder. To stand there smiling like that, with a wild buffalo plunging toward him! Why, the Kid would smother him cold! "Run!"

Hardwick did not move; apparently he had not heard. But something happened—nobody knew just what—as Griffen reached his victim. With incredible agility Hardwick side-stepped and Griffen went full into the post. As he whirled about—and he did so quickly—Hardwick fell upon him with surprising savagery. Griffen covered, but not before Hardwick's right and left had sunk deep and hard into the fat. Griffen saved himself further punishment by clinching. The referee jumped in and pried them apart.

A vast sigh of satisfaction went up from the men. This was going to be a fight. The boss was no infant. He could take care of himself.

"Th' ol' son-of-a-gun!" cried Monahan. "Eh, Angus? Fooled us—huh?"

Hardwick wanted to scream. Griffen's glove, raking the scars in the break, had set every nerve twisting and writhing. It wasn't pain; it was nerves. His face became gray-white and his lips blue. Had Griffen comprehended, he could have finished Hardwick then and there. But those two buffets in the fat cautioned him to be wary. Hardwick could hit; more, he might have other tricks.

There followed some feinting, a few

ineffectual counters, then Griffen got in one that rocked Hardwick sorely; and he fell into a clinch because he had to. Again that glove bore down across the scars. This time, dizzy as he was, Hardwick understood. It was done with intention.

All the sense of bitter irony and disgust vanished instantly, and along with it chivalry, the instincts of fine breeding. The cold fury which leaped into being might have had its origin in the malady, or it might have been the recrudescence of the beast that lies hidden in all men. At any rate, he went at Griffen with such impetuosity and at the same time such skill, that when the bell rang he had Griffen in a neutral corner, covering desperately.

A roar went up. It carried to the streets. In the office Becky seized Torrence by the arm.

"What was that for?"

"I'll see." When he returned he was smiling. "Teddy is beating up the pug."

"Oh, you men are all beasts! This is the most abominable thing that ever happened in Pleasant Valley! You men *wanted* it to take place. You are all liars when you say you could not stop it!"

Torrence shook his head. He took her by the shoulders and forced her into her chair.

"It's no use to argue with you, little lady. We are beasts, for a fact. But there is an epic being written out there in the yard. A hundred years from now Teddy's great grandson—"

Becky covered her ears with her palms. She could see nothing—visualize nothing—but Teddy, bloody and shattered and shamed.

THERE was a cut over one of Hardwick's eyebrows, and his lips were puffed and bleeding. Monahan sponged these carefully while Angus McClure lightly massaged Hardwick's legs. The scars stood out vividly. He sat in a state of true relaxation; that is, he sat normally in his chair, his hands in his lap—whereas Griffen sprawled in his chair, his arms hanging to the ropes, which is not good for the wind.

The bell sounded. The men met in the center of the ring this time. Griffen caught Hardwick on the neck and knocked him down. Hardwick took the count of nine, jumped up and danced away. Griffen followed, grimly determined. He walked

into three smart jabs. He tried again for Hardwick's jaw and missed. They clinched.

"If you touch those scars in the break," said Hardwick, "I'll kill you."

Griffen uttered a phrase that has caused more than one murder. He tried to maneuver the glove, but he had to free an arm to do so, and was thereby hoist on his own petard. They could hit with one arm free. Hardwick sent a jab to the stomach that forced Griffen to back away.

Then followed one of those tense moments in the ring which sweep the spectators off their feet. Why? Where's the psychologist who can translate it into words? Is it the beast? Who can say? Two men, half naked, standing toe to toe and pummeling each other with furious blows, blows that cut and numbed and rocked: what is there in this to carry men off their feet, to cause them to wave their arms, throw up their hats and cheer?

Are human beings any better for having witnessed such a scene? Are they any worse? Who attend prize-fights these days? Who but poets, authors, dramatists, business men, lawyers, politicians, clerks, laborers, aristocrats! A foggy Anglo-Saxon idea that it is healthy for a nation legally to permit two trained men to thrash each other, sometimes for money and sometimes for fun. The manly art of self-defense—stone-axes, broad-swords, rapiers, gloves. And dogs still gaze upon us with rapt idolatry!

In roughing it, however, Hardwick got considerably the worst of it. Monahan chided him energetically.

"I wanted to end it, Micky. For God's sake, keep that ice-water off my body!"

"They hurt?" asked Monahan, referring to the scars.

"Like hell! That's why I tried to end it. I thought I was fit, and I'm full of straw. If I last six rounds, it will be a miracle. . . . Damn fool!"

Monahan was appalled. That cry had gone down into his soul. For once he had no words. Straw! Old Dynamite filled with straw! The phrase became a kind of whirligig in Monahan's brain, and at the bell he pushed his Captain into the ring without a word of encouragement. His throat was stuffed with an unbroken sob. Straw!

THE end came in the fourth round. Hardwick, sorely pressed, growing weaker after each give-and-take, realizing that

under the conditions he was no match for Griffen, Hardwick suddenly remembered that in a fight of this kind men sometimes used their heads.

There was an exchange. All at once Hardwick dropped to his hands and knees. At nine he was up, but apparently done for. Griffen rushed in with deadly intent. He knew now that he never could give Hardwick the beating he had planned. He would have to be content with a simple knockout.

Hardwick staggered about helplessly, his arms covering his face. There was a vast amount of astonishment at the ring-side. Griffen himself wasn't certain what had happened. But Hardwick was groggy, and that was enough for him. He danced from side to side, waiting for the opening that presently must come, ready to strike with right or left. He could have won easily with a blow to the plexus; but the beast in him demanded Hardwick's jaw—to break it if he could. And then—

Magically Hardwick's body became tense, his legs set. A yell of warning came from Griffen's corner, but too late. Hardwick's left described what is known as the corkscrew. It whipped out and over with the dazzling rapidity of a striking adder. The impact of the glove on Griffen's black jaw was heard all over the yard. Griffen's knees buckled, and he toppled over on his face—out. A trick as old as the game itself, and often successful, if you have the nerve to risk it!

Hardwick stared gloomily down at his adversary. The last shot in the locker! He staggered toward the ropes with the intention of making off at once to the company wash-room. He wanted to get away from it all. The sense of shame came smothering down again. Besides, he was in intolerable misery. All the nerves in his body lay under the skin. The pain he did not mind; but the feel of crawling nerves was maddening.

A roar went up, now that the men fully understood what had happened. Never before had such a human noise stirred the yard's echoes, and probably never again would the echoes know anything like it. The men began milling and swirling and heaving. Suddenly Hardwick shot up above the vortex, hoist on the shoulders of his men—his, as he was theirs. And they carried him in triumph to the locker-room. Despite the sense of shame and disgust, Hardwick was conscious of the finest thrill

he had ever known. Something told him that he had won these turbulent demi-gods; and his eyes filled. He recalled the grandfather's spectacle-case in his coat pocket, and a bit of hysteria touched him.

The men helped him on with his clothes, fought for the possession of the discarded gloves, and shook his hand. Why not? He was their kind. They could talk to a boss like this one and be understood. That he had been ready to exhibit the company books, show them the business from top to bottom, give them a square deal, was nothing. Anybody could talk; but it took a man to knock out Kid Griffen.

"You ol' son-of-a-gun!" said Monahan.

"You ol' son-of-a-gun!"

"It was the last trick in the bag, Micky. He could have killed me if he hadn't been so crazy to spoil my looks."

His own shoes, he thought. By a queer stroke of perverse luck, some jest of Fate, he wouldn't have to wobble around in the grandfather's. The old boy! Had his shade been out there in the yard, or had he merely turned over in his grave?

"WELL, here I am Becky. Bunged up; horribly ashamed; and not at all sure that I'm awake. But I started it, and I had to go through with it. If I could find a hole to crawl into and pull it in after me, I'd hunt it out this minute. I've shamed you, Becky; and I'm darned sorry. The town—"

"I don't care a hoot what the town thinks—now!" she interrupted. "The beast!" she added as she brushed back the hair from the cut over his discolored eye. "The poor lips! Oh, Teddy, Teddy, what a mixed-up place this world is!"

"It sure is, old-timer. Without that tomato I might have been a very respectable young man in Pleasant Valley circles. And now—yellow if I'd backed out, bruiser because I didn't. What the deuce are you grinning about, Torrence? I shouldn't wonder if you'd framed the whole business so as to hang on to your job!"

"The Lord did the framing, Teddy. He moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform. There won't be any strike here—not after a yell like that!"

"That was some yell, wasn't it?"

Teddy turned his head so he could look up into his sister's face. There was still a vestige of tears, and Becky's nose was pink. She smiled down into his puffed

and discolored eyes; and he shook his head ever so slightly. All these tears, all this worry and tenderness, and still she could plan to deceive him! Women were funny.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHAT happened in Pleasant Valley the day after? The men of the town chuckled. They whacked each other on the back and crooked a finger toward the cellar door. Why not? If ever there was a good excuse to go cellarward it was now. The richest exploit that had ever come to town! Had there ever been an exploit like it anywhere else? They doubted it. Their own Teddy, beating up a professional pugilist, Marquis of Queensberry style, in the mill yard, and stopping a strike at the same time!

Hardwick remained home all day, brooding. Becky stayed home, too. She wanted to keep her eye on him. She was afraid. She longed to tell him everything, and dared not. There was no foretelling what he might do. He might denounce Arthur to the police, or he might go Berserker, seek out Arthur and kill him.

But neither Teddy nor she herself knew what real misery was: that would be Arthur's portion—Arthur, who had lost everything, who stood alone, forlorn, hopeless. For what hope had he? And where was he this night? Sometimes Becky felt the desire to scream aloud: nightmares were often dissipated that way.

There was good news in the evening paper. The local union had decided not to call out the Hardwick men. The Captain's plans would be given a try-out. Thus the union saved its face; but it fooled nobody in Pleasant Valley. The local union had not dared to risk a failure. Even the bitterly radical members recognized this fact, that for a while Hardwick would be able to hold his men by the glamour of his fistful prowess.

Becky was secretly delighted over the change the mill news wrought in her brother. He was gay and cheerful at dinner, entertainingly reminiscent. She took this as a sign that from now on his queer fits of rage would leave the peak and begin to go downhill, toward evanishment.

"The men are all right, underneath. They're good sports. They've been lis-

tening to a lot of rot, but we'll get together now. I'll have a chance to put my scheme through; and when they get at what I'm honestly trying to do, the union won't have any job but that of signing new cards occasionally. That yell gave me the biggest thrill I ever had. And all on a fluke!"

"But you must never let anybody know that," Becky warned.

"You can trust me for that, old girl."

"Going out?"

"No. Going to get a good book."

He took down "David Balfour," lit his pipe and stretched out on the lounge. But somehow the old tale did not grip as it used to. From time to time Hardwick found himself staring over the top of the book at the window. There were faces in the night, dim, nebulous, the faces of comrades he had loved and would see no more; sections of trenches; black moving silhouettes etched against the red hell of enemy barrage; a piano in a dugout tinkling ragtime with air-bombs *bumping* about; the bonneted angels of mercy will their coffee and doughnuts; the woman he loved. All the rest of his life these fragments would be rising up in the dark beyond windows or forming in woodfires or trembling at eventide on the face of sweet waters.

THE doorbell rang. Shortly afterward Edward the butler entered the library and presented a note to Hardwick.

"The boy said there would be no answer, sir."

"All right, Edward."

Hardwick studied the address. The fine, slanting penmanship vaguely reminded him of the French. Perhaps some French officer he had known was passing through town. He'd have the chap to dinner. He tore open the envelope and read the contents. Slowly his hand crushed the sheet of paper into a ball. Becky. Visiting that fellow's rooms in the night! The affair already on the town's tongue! Hardwick sat down: he was afraid to go to Becky at this moment; so he permitted five minutes to pass. At length he rose and walked out into the hall, reasonably assured that he had his fury under control. But he discovered Becky holding in her hands a gray cloth hat which he instantly recognized as the same Endicott had worn that night in the office.

When Becky saw the blazing notes in

her brother's eyes, the drawn white of his face, she became hypnotized.

"Where is he?"

"Who?"

"That damned scoundrel! That's his hat. Where have you hidden him?"

"Why, Teddy!" she cried, reaching out her arms.

But he flung her arms savagely aside, and for a moment held his balled fists over her head. Then he wheeled and rushed for the stairs, up which he raced for fear he might turn upon her and accuse her of treachery, of playing the game crooked, of planning to run away with Endicott. Inside his room he sat on the bed, the reaction leaving him stunned. Why, he had almost struck Becky! All he had in the world to love! What was going to become of him?

CHAPTER XXXIII

MORRISON could not find Ward, because the latter had instinctively kept to himself the existence of the room in the shabby lodging-house, where sometimes he slept and often changed his clothes. Ward could not tolerate the idea of being fettered, put aside simply because this Soblovski had learned what he was. Action, shifting scenes, excitement: he needed them as he needed the air he breathed—physical movement, to counteract the mental torture that was now his portion.

He did not know whether he would ever see Becky again except from the street; but he did know that he would fulfill his promise to her—to return to Washington and give himself up. He had lost Becky; he had lost her along with his ideals. Small matter what the law did to him! hanged him or imprisoned him.

Ward, in the guise of a laborer, had witnessed the epic in the Hardwick yard. When he saw the men hoist Hardwick to their shoulders, he understood that a miracle had happened. There would be no strike, with attendant street-riots and sabotage. The way would now be clear for the Federal authorities quietly to arrest such as they deemed dangerous. But Soblovski would be permitted to run out a longer rope. The Government would not dare lay a hand on him until the cache of dynamite was definitely located.

Monahan had found nothing in Griffen's

locker. Ward had found nothing in Soblovski's room, which he had searched diligently during Soblovski's absence, early in the evening. Monahan had telephoned that the quarry had entered a gambling resort and would doubtless while away an hour or two at faro-bank. Ward had his trouble for nothing, for he found not a scrap of incriminating evidence, not a letter, not even a clothier's label.

He had a narrow escape from being discovered by Morrison, whom he saw in the alley below. Ward was compelled to leave the room by the door to gain the street. Of all men, he did not want Morrison to see him, for that would entail a series of questions he would be forced to answer. So long as Morrison did not know of the room in the lodging-house, Ward felt that he would be free to come and go as he pleased.

After escaping the vigilant eye of his former comrade in arms, Ward picked up Monahan and proceeded to the mills. One thought was constantly in the minds of both—the phrase, "eleven o'clock." Ward was tempted to warn Morrison anonymously of this sinister portent, but on second thought he decided to play out this side of the game himself.

ON the night Hardwick received the anonymous letter, Monahan had stationed himself across the street from the Hardwick place. Why? Because his hunch ordered him to do so. He was sure of two things: they would blow up the mills or the Hardwick home.

He became tremendously excited, when around ten o'clock, he saw Kid Griffen emerge from the lilacs, step out upon the sidewalk and hurry toward the city. Monahan followed as rapidly as he dared, from the opposite side of the street, ducking behind trees whenever he neared a street lamp. Kid Griffen, coming out of Hardwick's!

The trail was a short one. Before Griffen had journeyed three blocks, Monahan saw another man appear, out of nowhere, apparently. This individual stopped directly in front of Griffen, who started to run. Monahan heard a sharp call and saw Griffen come to a sudden stop, his hands above his head.

Monahan's first thought was that this newcomer might be his employer; but as the man came up behind Griffen, Monahan saw a strange face. He also saw the glint

of manacles. Griffen had been arrested by some other secret agent. Monahan determined to warn his employer at once. But Ward could see no logical reason for Soblovski & Company blowing up a private dwelling, when the mills offered such a fine target.

"The man you saw arrest Griffen, Micky, is the best friend I have in the world," Ward said when Monahan reported the occurrence to him. "He is Morrison of the Department, and my superior. For some reason he wanted to put me on the shelf for a while. That is why I keep away from my apartment. But I can tell you what this arrest signifies. Morrison has concluded to take away all of Soblovski's props and leave him standing alone."

"But what was Griffen doin' in the Captain's yard?"

"Simply prowling around, hoping that he might meet Hardwick and take revenge for the humiliation. Soblovski might blow up the mills, but he's not the kind who would waste time on a brick house that would mean nothing to the cause."

"Maybe that's the dope," said Monahan.

But he was unconvinced. Tomorrow night he would watch again, play what he called his hunch.

THE masked ball at the Armory on Friday night was the first big social affair in Pleasant Valley since the winter of '13-'14: an affair where the wife of the proletariat, the wife of the bourgeoisie, provided each had five dollars, could hobnob with the wife of the aristocrat.

Madame Celeste, in Becky's discarded domino and curtained mask, went down the gallery staircase slowly. She had not put on the costume of Columbine, considering that part of her promise to Becky as unimportant. She would wander about for an hour or so, then go home.

It was useless to go on telling herself that she was wearing the domino simply to please Hardwick's sister. She knew now that she would have declined, had not Becky informed her that Hardwick would not be in costume. And what would she do if he spoke to her, accepting her as his sister?

The orchestra was playing a waltz—an old one of Herbert's. It set the machinery of recollection in motion; and she was not thinking in the present as she stepped upon the waxed floor.

Bluebeards and Dolly Vardens, knights and monks, cowboys and pirates, Chaplins and Pickfords and Peter Pans, and drolls with confetti, whirled past her; but she saw only the color and not the form. Thus, when Hardwick touched her sleeve, her mind was still bemused by her recollections and she did not accept him as real.

"I've decided to talk it over, Becky. Can't do it here. The car is outside, and we can sit in that. Wont take ten minutes."

Perhaps it was the touch of his hand; perhaps it was the sound of his voice. At any rate, without the slightest protest, she went along with him to one of the entrances not in use tonight, and which gave out upon a short, narrow street, poorly lighted. He slipped his arm under hers, opened the door and led her forth.

Rain. The equinox was beginning to grumble. There was distant thunder, too. The touch and smell of rain awoke her to the realization of what was taking place. What had she been thinking of? Frightened, she attempted to release her arm and draw back. She never had any clear idea of what followed. Blackness (in the shape of Hardwick's coat) fell upon her, smothering her cry. When she came out of that stifling dark, the big touring car was lurching drunkenly into the night.

Stupefaction—terror—then anger. The latter emotion energized her physically, only to acquaint her with the fact that her wrists and ankles were bound!

CHAPTER XXXIV

THERE were other peak episodes that Friday night, one of which would always be memorable to the citizens of Pleasant Valley.

Often we plan something; and nothing surprises us so much as to see this plan go through. Imagine Becky! When, from her point of vantage in the opposite gallery, she saw Madame Celeste follow her brother, she was equally mystified and elated. She had not expected any such luck. She ran to the stairs and down them, wending in and out among the dancers to the door through which she saw her brother and Madame Celeste pass. Whatever had Teddy said to the woman? She opened the door slightly, in time to see Madame struggling furiously in Teddy's arms, immediately to vanish inside the car!

Becky's first impulse was to run out and stop the affair. After all, she had no right to play such a trick upon a woman who had been actuated by the spirit of friendliness to don that domino. To be sure, Becky had wanted it to happen exactly like this; but to witness the event lent a discreditable angle. Before this impulse induced physical action, however, a second impulse smothered it. An odd adventure of this character might be the very thing to throw his mind back into the old groove, to cause the necessary break in his disordered brooding. Teddy was as honorable a man as lived. The woman would be in no real danger, though she might be considerably shocked and inconvenienced.

But what was the matter with her? Why had she followed Teddy at all? Why hadn't she raised the mask after he had spoken to her? Unless—frightful thought!—the woman had some definite plan of her own. And yet that was nonsense. The woman was an agent of the Federal Government, which did not select its agents haphazardly. Nevertheless there was a mystery here.

Of course Teddy would not get far without discovering his mistake. Becky decided to return home and wait for him there. Her interest in the ball was nothing now. It was quarter to eleven when she arrived home—to find Ward pacing the study!

"You sent for me, Becky? What is it you wish?"

"Why, I didn't send for you, Arthur!" Becky cried, astonished, struck sharply by the haggardness of his face. She wanted to comfort him; her heart swelled with pity and love and tenderness. "And yet some good fairy must have sent you here. We must start in pursuit at once."

"What—in pursuit of whom?"

"Teddy. I never told you, Arthur, that I had taken out a marriage license, and that one of the clerks in the bureau betrayed me. Teddy intended to kidnap me and carry me off to the camp, and keep me there until I was ready to give you up. But instead he has kidnaped Madame Celeste, whom I inveigled into wearing my original domino. Teddy is a reckless driver even in peaceful times. Tonight—"

"You did not send for me?"

"I might have, if I had known where to find you," she answered reproachfully. "Eleven o'clock!" she added as the clock on the mantel began to chime.

"Good God!" cried Ward, now comprehending the trap he had been led into. "Run to the rear—quick!"

"Why?"

The word had scarcely crossed her lips when the floor buckled under her feet and a thousand thunders beat upon her ears. The walls wavered; the air became filled with bitter dust, crashing sounds, rumblings, then, swift darkness. From far away she heard a voice.

"Don't stir! Keep perfectly still for a moment!"

SHE ceased to be afraid; she sensed only curiosity over this singular phenomenon which presented an unobstructed view of the lighted windows of the houses across the street, the rain falling aslant the arc-lamps, the bark of the elms shining like crumpled silver, the glittering grass and shrubbery—the full night. She was not bothering her head as to what had happened to produce this effect; she was merely interested in this picture which, but a moment gone, had consisted of rows upon rows of neatly bound books. This sense of unsubstantiality was prolonged by three pistol-shots. Becky saw the three tabs of vivid flame just beyond the sidewalk hedge.

"Follow the spot-light, Becky." It was Ward's voice. The rear of the house is all right—just the front is gone."

Becky followed the traveling spot of light from his electric torch. The floor reminded her of bending ice over which she and Teddy in childhood had often risked their lives. It was only when she found herself confronted by the anxious countenance of Edward the butler, who was holding a candelabrum above his head, that Becky came into the full realization of the catastrophe.

Edward led the way to the kitchen, where the women servants were huddled in a corner. He began imperturbably to trim the wicks of some candles. Miss Becky had not been hurt. That was all the tonic his nerves required.

"Edward," said Ward, "take good care of Miss Becky. I've got to be off. There may be fire. If there is, don't permit her to attempt to save anything."

"Yes, sir."

"Aunt!" cried Becky in horror. "Her room was over the library!"

"She is all right, Miss Becky," interposed Edward, heating a candle-end be-

fore he pressed it into the scone. "She decided to watch the dancing at the ball, and called a taxi. She left a little while before you returned."

Becky sat down in the kitchen chair and bent her head in her hands. Ward patted her shoulder reassuringly; then ran to the kitchen door. He wanted to know the meaning of those pistol shots.

CHAPTER XXXV

SOBLOVSKI, or Varady, or by whatever name he called himself, stood inside the door, the rain dripping from his slicker. He pushed in. The maid was wondering how she should act.

"Madame is not in."

"Where is she?"

"At the ball—the costume ball at the Armory."

"Did she say when she would be back?"

"No sir." The maid recognized the man now. He was the one Madame had described and who was never to be admitted. She began to shake with fear.

Varady paid no further attention to her, but strolled about the room. He hadn't noticed the room during the initial adventure; now he was curious. Tawdry, full of cheap jimcracks, as might be expected; but here and there an article which proclaimed not the medium but the woman. At length he returned to the consultation table and looked about for a clean sheet of paper.

"A pencil," he demanded.

"The drawers are locked."

"Pen and ink, then. Don't be a fool. I'm not a burglar. I wish to leave a note for your mistress. If you won't get the materials, why, I'll go foraging myself. Run along. It will be the quickest way of getting rid of me."

Partially convinced, the maid scurried into the kitchen for her own pen and bottle of ink and scurried back. She was relieved to find her visitor exactly where she had left him. She set the pen and ink by his elbow and stood back, still distrustful.

Varady wrote three sentences. He folded the sheet of paper and set the ink-bottle upon it. Then he got up. He fumbled under the slicker for a cigarette, which he lit, then approached a window out of which he stared obliquely, searchingly, for ten minutes. Not a sign of a hu-

man being anywhere. Varady shrugged. They took it for granted that he wouldn't be such a fool as to sally forth in the rain. The damned meddler—just when he had found suitable amusement. Rain—rain always brought him luck of one kind or another. He turned toward the door.

"Here," he said, spinning a coin in the air. The maid caught the half-dollar dextrously, and her distrust vanished.

"Call the attention of your mistress to the note."

"Yes sir."

Varady went out. The maid ran to the door and shot the bolt. Then she returned and opened the note. So long as it wasn't in a sealed envelope, her act would be indiscreet rather than criminal. She read:

Will call for you tomorrow night at nine. Leaving Pleasant Valley. You will leave with me, sensibly, or by the hair of your head.

As he reached the street door below, Varady's glance ranged up and down, covering both sides of the street. He would have to hurry. It did not matter whether the girl was in the house or not. Ward would be there; possibly the brother—and the two of them flying at each other's throat, as the earth opened up! The picture filled Varady with sardonic humor. And Griffen would naturally be the accused. Vengeance, a satisfying and complete vengeance! Tomorrow, off and away; and if Patricia refused to go with him. Well, he would know how to deal with her. . . .

He started off rapidly.

MONAHAN fell in behind, allowing Varady a hundred yards or more. The boy clung to the shadows: a trick he had learned in France, thus letting shadows absorb him. Many times he had performed the deadly business of volunteer scouting, and more than once a friendly shadow had saved his life. Still, the wet slicker might catch the light from the street-lamps. He cursed the need of the slicker. The wind drove against his shins, impeding his stride. On the other hand, he couldn't afford to meander all night without some protection from the rain. Thunder, huh? Lightning too. Some night for a chase such as this promised to be. Where was the Dope going? Well, that would come to light presently.

Monahan ducked into a shadow. The

man in front had stopped—but only to light a cigarette. Later, a whiff of Turkish tobacco made Monahan wonder how long he could go without a smoke. Young *Nick Carter* would have to wait.

Varady turned a corner, and Monahan quickened his step. He peeked around the corner to see Varady cutting across the street diagonally. For a space Monahan was in a quandary. If he crossed, Varady couldn't help seeing him; if he trailed along this side, shadows wouldn't count. An auto-truck solved Monahan's difficulty. The moment it cut off Varady from view, Monahan dashed to the rear of it, held pace there for a dozen strides, then made for the sidewalk. It would look as though he had been riding the truck and had just dropped off. Nevertheless he sought the nearest shadow. As Varady did not turn, the amateur *Nick Carter* picked up the trail again.

He followed on, using ingenious devices to allay any suspicions Varady might have—around this corner and that, across town, finally debouching out upon Broad Street. Something flamed up in Monahan's consciousness, illuminating a nebulous thought, as the lightning illuminated the shrubbery. Griffen last night, and the Dope tonight! Eleven o'clock! Monahan realized that to save his beloved Captain he would have to give up his sleuthing and take the rest of the journey on the run. He fell into a dog-trot.

All this while, without either Monahan or Varady being aware of the fact, the affair had been triangular since the outset. Morrison, the chief agent from the Department of Justice, had kept both under his eye all the evening. By now his admiration for Monahan's craftiness was considerable. The way the boy had used the truck, the shadows, without letting his actions take on a suspicious aspect—these impressed the agent, who was himself, by long practice, a master in this art.

But what was he doing in this game? What was the boy's object in trailing Varady? Was he under Ward's instructions? Bad. Ward would seriously interfere in this affair. Perhaps he should have told Ward the truth. But there you were: he had not dared trust Ward with the truth.

A clap of thunder and a vivid flash of lightning; the hedges and trees and roofs stood out boldly for a second. Almost immediately came a flash and rumble from

the Hardwick place. For all that he understood, Monahan was for the time being incapable of physical action. It was the sight of Varady coming toward him on a run that dissipated the incipient paralysis. He drew his automatic.

"Halt!"

But Varady only ran the faster, casting aside the slicker as he ran.

Without haste, coldly and relentlessly as the Nemesis who had chosen him as agent, Monahan dropped to one knee, leveled the weapon and fired three shots. Varady stopped as if he had run into an invisible barrier. For a second or two he appeared to be fighting off something, desperately. Then the bones in him seemed to melt, and he lost human semblance and became a motionless, misshapen thing on the sidewalk.

CHAPTER XXXVI

IT was fully a quarter of an hour before the neighborhood realized that a bomb outrage had taken place on Broad Street. The explosion, coming so quickly after the peal of thunder, had naturally been accepted as a second peal. So the events which immediately followed the killing of Jan Varady were off the board before the crowd gathered, before the ambulance and fire-engines came tearing up the hill.

Monahan got up and absently brushed his knee. He eyed his victim without emotion of any sort—as he would have gazed upon a log had it lain in his path. He had seen death before, gentle, terrible, grotesque: the awe was gone, never to return.

To kill the Captain, the squarest white man in the world! To kill Miss Becky too, if she happened to be in the house! A hand fell roughly upon his shoulder.

"Bad business for you, young man," said Morrison grimly.

"Huh? Oh, well, all right. They wont be slappin' this partic'lar guy on the wrist an' sayin' 'Naughty, naughty!' He's killed th' Captain an' his sister."

"Yes, yes; that may be; but you had no authority to shoot him. He wouldn't have got away. You have done something more than kill him; you have blocked important investigations of the Government."

"An' who are you?"

"Are you in Ward's—Endicott's—employ?"

"Yes sir."

"I am his chief."

Monahan extended the automatic, which was still hot. "Aw, hell! Y' oughta give me a medal. . . . I got one home!" There was a hysterical note in the boy's voice. His Captain back there, dead and mutilated!

There were two sides, mentally, to the man whose hand still gripped Monahan's shoulder—the human side that longed to take the boy in his arms and console him; the lawful side that was just, but merciless. He doddered. Perhaps his own words returned to strengthen the human side. Had he not said to the woman whose life Varady had wrecked that the death of the man would be welcome?—half in jest, half in earnest? The agent was not then permitted to make a decision. A man vaulted the hedge.

"Ward?"

"Yes. What's happened here?"

"Monahan, here, has killed—Soblovski. Arthur, this is a bad business all around. It wouldn't have happened if you had not hidden from me. I've men in town who would have prevented such a happening as this, if you told me all you knew. Hang it, we needed . . . Soblovski alive."

Ward vaguely wondered why Morrison hesitated in pronouncing the name Soblovski.

"You held things back, Arthur."

"Because I couldn't sit still and twiddle my thumbs. I can't explain to you, but I had to keep moving—or break. Morrison, you're not going to lock up this boy."

"I'll have to."

"No. You shot Soblovski."

"Impossible!"

"I say yes; Monahan had a certain authority to act for me. Reason a bit. There isn't a jury on earth that wouldn't cheer him out of court. A medal man, defending his country in France, defending it here!"

"He must give himself up. They'll cheer him out of court, but that's the route he'll have to go for his own sake. You don't want the boy to go through life with this kind of a secret. Monahan, go to the station and give yourself up. It's the only way."

"Yes, sir. But I had to do it. Was—was the Captain killed?"

"Nobody was hurt," said Ward. "I'm sorry, Micky, to have got you into this mess."

"Forget it! Nobody hurt? I should worry!"

Monahan saluted, wheeled and made off cityward.

Three policemen came running up. Morrison instantly exhibited his authority and posted the men at three points.

"Keep the crowds back when they come," he ordered. "This is Federal business." Morrison again turned to Ward. "Perhaps part of the fault is mine. I should have risked the truth. You have never seen Soblovski's face?"

"No."

"Put the light of your torch in his face, then, and you'll understand why I did not want you two to meet."

WITH a good deal of wonder, Ward obeyed. As the spot of light revealed the handsome if sardonic countenance of Jan Varady, Ward's sensation was something akin to that which one experiences when the flesh touches cold stone. The sensation held him in tableau. It was Morrison's hand on his arm that aroused him.

"My God! Jan Varady!"

The man he had killed with bare hands and left on the tousled bed in that mean rooming-house; Jan Varady, laughing in his sleeve all these years, while Arthur Ward ranged up and down the labyrinths of hell! The man who had wrecked Arthur Ward's life along with Pat's! Ward's heart suddenly swelled with fury: Varady had escaped!

"You understand now?" said Morrison. "I was afraid if you learned who he was, you'd forget your obligations to Uncle Sam and kill the skunk. It was you he tried to kill tonight. He has been playing with you from the start."

"Varady! . . . Morrison, I left this man for dead the night I went away from Washington with you. I never looked at a newspaper for weeks after. You're right; I would have tried to kill him again. And all this time he has been torturing her!"

A sob broke through; Ward's head drooped against Morrison's shoulder and Morrison could feel his friend's body shaking.

"Buck up, old man. The crowd is beginning to arrive. So you believed you had killed him! I was eternally wondering why you never mentioned or sought him. So that was it! You're a man of iron, Ward. Well, you needn't worry any more. There are three bullets in his black

heart. Your Monahan can shoot. And now I'll tell you something that will put you on your feet, sound and hearty. There is a woman in town, a special agent of mine, by the name of Madame Celeste."

The name awoke an echo in Ward's benumbed mind.

"Well, that woman is Patricia," announced Morrison gently.

The shock was like a buffet to Ward. He stood back from Morrison, but tense and erect. Suddenly he wheeled, vaulted the hedge and sped toward the haze of settling dust that still partly obscured the wrecked home of the Hardwicks.

"The rainbow!" said Morrison with kindly irony.

He knelt beside the body of Varady and set about the business of searching him. Even in death Varady mocked him. There was not a scrap of paper in his pockets or in the linings—nothing in the watch-case, nothing in the hat-bands. Morrison shook his head. All that dynamite still within reach of the fanatical Reds: it was a bad night's work for the Government.

Ward found Becky in the kitchen, making coffee. She sensed a presence behind her, and turned. The radiant expression on his face so astonished her that she nearly dropped the coffee-pot.

"Why, what has happened?"

"Everything, Becky! I did not kill Varady; I only thought I did. He had been alive all this while, weaving his devil-webs under the name of Soblovski. But he's dead now. Monahan just shot him. The boy believed that his Captain had been killed. But don't worry about Micky. The town will make a hero out of him. But I'm free, Becky. Do you understand? A poor benighted fool, but free!"

Becky set the coffee-pot on the stove; then she sat down abruptly—and began to cry. He dropped to his knees beside her.

"I've given you a bitter time of it, but there isn't a cloud anywhere now."

The thunder roared outside and Becky smiled through her tears.

"Becky, have you a top to your roadster?"

"Yes."

"Any gas in the tank?"

"There's plenty in the garage."

"We are going after your brother. We are going to tell Madame Celeste, as you call her, that the man Varady is dead."

Becky did not understand the allusion. The suddenness of some events robs the brain of its faculty of absorption. She had not fully recovered from the sensation of feeling the floor buckle under her feet. But when she finally grasped the amazing truth, she became the embodiment of spectacular haste.

"Edward, make up sandwiches and fill the thermos with coffee. Tell Auntie to stay at the Baxters. Mary, get me some of your heavy clothes. My room is wrecked. Come, Arthur; I'll help you with the car while they're getting these things. Hurry! I understand now why she followed him like that. Oh, the wonder of it! Teddy, taking her off like that, and never dreaming! The woman who pulled him through—who'll pull him through again! Don't you understand, Arthur? She'll pull him through again!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

WHAT of this woman, not understanding the reason for this abduction, tossed from side to side, bruised, stifled, helpless, her wrists and ankles bound, the curtain of the mask making it difficult for her to breathe freely?

The fury was upon him. She knew it by the lurch and roll of the car. At any moment the machine might leap into the ditch. She was not afraid to die; but it was horrible to think of dying tied up in this manner. And not even knowing the reason why!

Twice she slipped to the floor of the tonneau, the edges of boxes and suitcases bruising her side. The mortal misery of the endeavor to right herself and regain the seat! The wonder was that she did not faint from exhaustion. Her hair had fallen down; the mask had slipped sidewise and she could see only through one eye-hole.

And always those bent shoulders of the madman! He was hatless. The little lamp over the speedometer touched his throat and chin: that was all she could see that had human semblance. But the meaning of it? Where was he taking her? Maddening questions! Had Becky tricked them both? But even then, why should he treat his sister in this fashion, like some criminal?

Occasionally she caught the flash of a few lights as they whirled through some village. But this ceased to happen after

they left the macadam of the State road. The curtains flapped and the top rumbled; the rain drummed and slashed. Wooden bridges—the planks rattled like machine-gun fire. She began dimly to perceive the odors of earth and balsam. They were entering a section of the woods. Presently the car slowed down a little, but lurched and slewed beyond anything that had previously taken place. Every bone in her body ached. She began to sob primitively. The car stopped.

She saw Hardwick get out. She raised her numb hands and tried to pull off the mask, only to drag it down far enough to prevent her seeing at all. Her hair, in falling over the band of the mask, had trapped it securely. She decided to cease fighting against the inevitable. It was not possible he would keep her in this condition much longer. Five minutes—ten—perhaps fifteen; then she heard the door open. How he managed it she could not tell, but a moment later she was cradled in his arms, and he was staggering through the rain with her. Twenty strides; then came three abrupt rises—steps. She heard him kick the door open, and shortly she knew she was being gently deposited upon a canvas lounge. Her wrists and ankles were liberated, but she did not stir. She had reached a point where she did not care what happened.

HARDWICK was speaking. She was able to catch a sentence here and there; the roar of the engine and the flapping of the curtains was still echoing in her ears.

"I gave you all the opportunity in the world, Becky, to play your game above-board; but you would have it this way."

So it was Becky? He had kidnapped her, believing her to be his sister. A bit of clearing in the fog.

"How we got through tonight, God knows! The fury had me A dozen times I wanted to send the car into the ditch! I'm sorry if I was rough Damn it all! Can't any of you realize that I'm half cracked? I'm not a man; I'm only a picture of one. I died over there and didn't know it! And every hour since I got home, something has happened to make me boil up To cheat your brother! You can't lie out of it. You got the license, and you were going to run away with him tonight. Couldn't wait and give your brother a chance! I'll kill him!

He's taught you how to play the sneak, damn him! You're going to stay here until you're cured—or I am!"

She heard him tramp to the door; she heard that bang on the latch. So that was it? Becky! Attempting to run away with some man in defiance of her brother's wishes. That did not seem like the girl. Glamour, the eternal human delusion, the woman-trap, stretching across these seven thousand years! Glamour, that had wrecked her own life! Oh, the poor boy! Half mad, and meeting the lash whichever way he turned—and the consciousness of the malady so much added danger! He would brood now, brood himself into incurable melancholia.

The old terror returned full tide—the terror that had driven her away from his hospital cot, the terror that had drawn her irresistibly to Pleasant Valley. What would he do when he saw her face? Or had he forgotten it? Dear God, if only he *had* forgotten it! Not from her hand the final blow! For over there, he had cared. She had seen it in his eyes, and so she had run away. If he had forgotten—a little!

She sat up painfully. She was bruised from head to foot. Once she had ridden all night in a munitions camion, but the result had been nothing like this. Presently she reached behind and flung her hair forward, sought the band of the mask and snapped it. After the dazzle left her eyes, she glanced about. There was a wood fire burning. A pair of candles stood on a table littered with magazines, gray and speckled with the dust of two years. A sportsman's lodge or bungalow—no sign of a woman's hand anywhere. Cedar logs with the bark still on—the pleasant odor of balsam mingled with the faint, acrid smoke of wet wood.

Alone with him, in the wilderness, doubtless miles from any other habitation—the man she loved! To disillusion him, if he hadn't forgotten, to tell him the truth, all of it, every sordid grain of it—and cure him.

WITH what few hairpins she could find, she built up her hair as conventionally as possible. She wondered if she looked half as crazy as she felt. Whatever had possessed her to follow him out of the Armory like that? A word or two would have discovered to him his mistake, and then he would never have known.

She heard him returning, and her body

began to tremble. Fascinated, she eyed the turning doorknob. The latch freed, the wind blew in the door. Hardwick, his arms filled with suitcases and bundles, stepped into the room, sending the door to with a violent kick of the heel.

The leaning candle flames righted themselves; and then he saw the face that had haunted his dreams these many weeks. Slowly his burdened arms sank, and the suit-cases and packages clattered and thudded at his feet. He refused to accept what he saw as fact. Hallucination! He covered his eyes with his hands and waited for this thing to pass away; then he looked again.

Her face, where Becky's should have been!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

SOMETHING in his expression warned her to speak at once.

"No, no!" she cried, her hands outstretched. "It is I! I am real! It is all a dreadful mistake; but I am real—soldier-boy!" She used the old phrase with the hope that it would steady him. She rose and moved toward him, all pity and love and tenderness.

But Hardwick backed away, extending a palm as if to fend off this impossible apparition.

"Dear God, what shall I do? . . . He doesn't understand!"

The tone got through to his consciousness. This wasn't Becky's voice.

She thought quickly. She understood what the true meaning of his actions was: he was terrified by the fear that his reason was going, for her presence here wasn't reasonable; it would have been a test for ordinary credulity, let alone a brain shaken profoundly by unaccountable deflections from normality. And besides, there was this tremendous ride through the night, his hands ever on the wheel, his glance ever on the road. A man with a normally functioning brain would have been fagged, stupid. What to say to steady him? The ring!

"Did you keep the ring?"

"Yes, I kept it," he said mechanically. And then the truth struck him in all its amazing wonder. "You!"

"Yes! I'm real!"—eagerly.

"You—out of nowhere! You're there, but my poor old noddle won't take it in!

Just a minute. I'd better sit down. . . . Kind o' groggy!" He stumbled into the nearest chair; then, with his elbows on his knees, he once more covered his eyes. "Can't trust 'em. Talk, say something that'll give me a grip on things."

"I have been in Pleasant Valley on Government business," she hurried on. "I met your sister. She asked me if I wouldn't go to the ball in this domino. That's how the mistake occurred."

"Becky!" He jumped up. "By the Lord God, she's done it! Tricked us both! Gone off with that scoundrel! I'll kill him!"

She pressed him back into the chair. "Please!" She placed a palm against his forehead. "Back there in France, you always did what I wanted you to."

"Here as well as there. All right! I won't let it get to me this time. No reason in my head when the thing hits me. I'll be quiet. But Becky! She doesn't realize what a state I'm in. I may kill some one before it's done with me. Keeps getting worse. But I understand. God sent you here to pull me around. Nobody but you can do it. I'll do whatever you say—because I love you."

She wanted to cry out. This was torture unbearable. But for a little while she must not think of herself. She began to smooth his hair. Always she had been able to quiet him thus.

"Tell me what has happened."

"Why, Becky has run away and married a mucker; against my wishes, in spite of my knowledge of men. A mucker nobody really knew anything about. Hypnotized her! I tried to save her. . . . All right! Endicott will never touch a dollar of her money." Then the amazing fact struck him. "You—you two know each other!" His throat filled. "What is Endicott to you?"

"My brother. His name is Arthur Endicott Ward."

"Brother—your brother!" he said weakly. "You were in France. Why wasn't he? Your brother!"

"My brother—brave as Bayard and as guileless as Galahad—a dear dreamer. Oh, I can defend Arthur, even if I can't defend myself! Come over to the lounge where we can sit together. And don't worry about your sister. Arthur hasn't run away with her."

"But she had the license! She tricked us both tonight!"

"And without his knowing what she was up to—of that I'm as certain as I breathe."

He permitted her to lead him over to the canvas lounge. There was still some doubt in his mind that this was real.

"Why didn't he go to France? Why did you run away, Patricia Ward?"

"That—or Patricia Varady"—with bitter irony. "Only God knows which! But of that, more anon. You speak of khaki. Well, yes. You wore it like a hero. But my brother wore his dungarees like a hero. Oh, I've learned so many amazing things these last few days! Did you ever stop to think how easily our transports crossed the Atlantic?"

"I lay in the mud and the rain—"

She interrupted. "I know, poor boy! You can't help feeling the way you do. But Arthur has blundered on some point, I don't know what or why. He crossed the Atlantic six times in the coal-bunkers of transports."

"In the coal-bunkers?" Hardwick began to wake up, generally. The library-hound, crossing in the bunkers of transports!

"In the coal-bunkers, standing watch twelve hours, inspecting every shovel of coal that went into the furnaces. Several times he found ingenious infernal machines, which, if passed into the fire, would have sunk all on board. For a year he lived in the slums of Hoboken, causing the arrest of three groups of bomb-makers. I only just found out. I never knew. For four years—since 1915—he has gone forth, day by day, with his life in his hands. If he died, it would be an ugly, unknown death. A dreamer, a scholar who loved books, a vast fortune under his hand—he played the game because some one had to play it. The Government called upon his services because his hobby was explosives. And the queer part of it, he hated firearms. His ambition was to create an explosive so terrible that war would automatically cease; and failure nearly broke his heart. But I broke that."

A PAUSE. A gust of wind sent the rain lashing upon the windows.

She went on. "He never killed. He would tramp for days in the woods with only his pack and his camera. The wild things knew. He was always bringing back squirrels he had tamed, showing them to me and then letting them go. The heart of a lion and the tenderness of a girl! Because his country needed him,

needed his peculiar gifts, he answered—as you answered, when it needed fighters. And often, over there, I dreaded the rounds. At any hour I might see him. For knowing him as I do, I was sure he was in France. Without glory, living half the time in kennels unfit for dogs, because the country he loved so passionately needed him here. Don't worry about Becky!"

"But why, in God's name, did he wrap himself up in all this fog? What was he ashamed of? She couldn't defend him. Wouldn't that make any brother rare and tear? He came to me twice, but the red fury the sight of him created in me wouldn't let me listen. Why didn't he tell Becky all these facts? I can't get that. He's the biggest fool I ever heard of—bigger than I am! God alone knows what kept me from killing him the second time he came into the office. I can't get it."

It puzzled the woman too, but she dared not admit it to Hardwick. It wasn't like Arthur to conceal his motives in fog.

"Why did you run away?"

"I didn't run away. My time of service was up, and I did not renew it. I was restless. I believed it best just to drop out. If I had told you boys, you might have urged me to remain. And I was something of a wreck. At that time—long after the armistice—there were plenty of nurses."

"But without a word!" He took one of her hands between his two. A little while would not matter, she thought; he would soon drop the hand.

"I went to France, not as an angel of mercy, but to find death. But God soon made me see that He had use for me. You fascinated me. No, no—not sentimentally. It was that death had a hand on your shoulder and you threw it off. You willed to live because you had work to do. You are alive because you willed it. When you weren't talking about your boys, you were talking about your mills, what you were going to do for the men when you returned. I don't know if you ever groaned when you were alone, but I never heard you. Always cheerful, always ready with a smile. So, then, I caught some of it—this indomitable spirit to go on."

"Will you marry me—Pat?"

Shocked by the unexpectedness of the query, she started away from him, but he would not let go her hand.

"No."

"But God sent you along with me this night."

"Because He isn't through with my expiation yet. I couldn't marry you if I wanted to. When I am through, you won't be so eager."

"I love you."

"Poor boy! What do you know about me? Nothing. What do I know about you? Everything. Soldier-boy, there are some things no man-love can possibly survive; and what you call love is presently going to die, here, in this room."

"We Hardwicks stick."

SHE made a negative sign. She was going to crucify her heart; but that was of no importance so long as she succeeded in disillusioning him.

"I always had what I wanted, which is bad for any human being. Servants were always at beck and call. To want anything, was to have it. Arthur had control of the estate; but whatever I wanted, he gave me. Money and servants and nothing to do! Both our parents were dead; there was no other woman in the family to watch over me. Once in a while Arthur went out; but there were always more graybeards than young people. So I became a part of one world and he a part of another. Understand, we were the best of friends—only we traveled different roads. I don't suppose he realized where my road was leading me, he was so interested in his own. Often, when I gave a dinner, his chair would remain vacant. I never felt hurt about it. Underneath, I suppose I was sound; but I was without direction. I liked to be going; I liked to dance, travel, enjoy myself. I was so assured of my position in the world that I believed I could step out of it and back without any particular harm."

There was a volley of thunder. Hardwick heard a tree go down near by. He pressed her hand to reassure her.

"Thunder and lightning ought not to trouble us," she interpolated.

"So it hadn't!" And for the first time he smiled. "But go on."

"One afternoon, at an artist's studio—where I shouldn't have gone alone—I met a man who instantly seized upon my imagination and did as he pleased with it. He had many graces, this man. He stood apart from the men I knew; and he soon exercised over me one of those inexplicable

fascinations. I believed it to be love. Ah, if I had had some real interest in life, as my brother had, things might have been different. Varady did not move in my world. Still, I invited him to a dinner-party one night. He was the life of the hour—witty, wise, charming. As usual, Arthur's chair was vacant; and we joked about it. Perhaps he saw Varady twice, but only as a passer-by. I was highly romantic, which is a pleasant way of calling myself an abysmal fool. You would believe that education and breeding would count—not always! All I had to do was to announce to Arthur that I intended to marry Varady. Probably Arthur would have kissed me and returned to his retorts."

"I love you."

"Wait until I have done. One night I got all my jewels together and ran away with Varady. It was a lark. Dear God, it was a lark! We were married in Harrisburg; and I sent Arthur a copy of the newspaper that carried the announcement. It took but a week to learn what manner of man I'd run away with. When he found that I had no control of my property, he threw down the mask. He told me that perhaps the marriage was legal and perhaps it wasn't. It was his threat to make the disclosure to Arthur that kept me to his side. I could not bring dishonor to him. So I remained silent, and permitted a strange world to swallow me up; Varady's world, low and sordid. I had made my bed, and would lie in it; I had courage enough for that. Moreover, I vowed I'd never ask Arthur for help. I have stood behind chairs and telegraphed Varady by code signs what cards men held in their hands. Sometimes, when I rebelled, he beat me. And always the fear that he would tell Arthur. . . . You are hurting my hand!"

"That was his throat," said Hardwick. "Do you know where he is?"

"What does it matter where he is? I was not only a fool; I was a cowardly thing."

"If I buy your freedom, will you marry me?"

"Another man's plaything?"

"No. Let us begin with that first night you came to my cot and laid your hand on my forehead and chased away the fiends that were torturing me. Let us begin life with that. Let us begin with the fact that I love you, and will always love you, and that just now I need you. I nearly struck

Becky last night. In my room I took out that ring, and somehow it quieted me. Don't you care just a little? Didn't you wish something when you dropped that ring?"

"I wished that you might be happy." She turned her head aside to hide the stinging tears.

"How can I be, if you wont make me? I tell you, there isn't any past. As if you hadn't wiped that out, angel of mercy!"

"Not even that; for I went to France to die, to be quit of it all." She pulled her hand free, got up and walked over to the mantel. "To be quit of it all! And you held me back. Supposing I married you, and chance threw some of those men across our path? I feel unclean! Often I look at my hands, wondering how they happen to remain white. No, soldier-boy; even if I loved you with all that's left of me, it would be impossible. The cup is bitter, but the knowing of you has given me the strength to drink it. Only by drinking it to the last dreg can I ever hope to feel rehabilitated. I'm done in body and soul. Suppose you take me back? I haven't any reputation to lose, but you have."

"My poor old noddle!" said Hardwick, his fingers plowing through his hair. "I don't seem to be able to think with it any more. Here I want you more than life, and I can't think of any words that will make you understand! I'll go to smash for sure if you run away again. I've been knocked about too much to stand a shock like that—to lose you again. Hang it, you and your brother—you both owe me something!" He said it with the old smile she knew so well. "Don't you care just a little?"

"Would it do any good to say I did? Tomorrow I shall disappear again, for all time. I shall not even see my brother again! I am strong enough for that. What, marry you—supposing it possible—and have the past bob up, now here, now there—see it hurt you, see it dig a chasm between us? Oh, no; I couldn't go through with that. . . . Hark!"

Hardwick turned his head, listening. He heard the rumble of a powerful automobile engine. He ran to one of the windows and pushed aside the curtain. He saw brilliant headlights zigzagging among the trees. The car careened as it took the curve to the lodge road, and stopped in the rear of the touring car. Hardwick left

the window and took his stand near the door, not knowing exactly what he was going to do. A hand, lightly touching his sleeve, drew his attention. He saw Patricia. Her expression was one of appeal. Then he understood who the visitors were.

There was a rush of feet upon the steps and veranda, and Ward, followed by Becky, came in.

CHAPTER XXXIX

WHAT astonished Hardwick, during the short tableau which followed Ward's entrance, was the absence of the murderous fury. He had been waiting for it, ready to beat it down, for the sake of the sister; and the sight of this pale, spectacled chap left him with an absurd sense of emptiness. Coal-bunkers—examining coal for hidden explosives—digging Reds out of their cellars—wanting to make an explosive so terrible that war would cease—taming squirrels and letting them go—mending the broken backs of books!

Ward broke the tableau by approaching his sister. He held out his arms, and she crept into them like a tired child.

For a few minutes no one stirred. Then Ward began to speak.

"My Pat! My poor Pat! I didn't mean to neglect you. I thought you were able to take care of yourself. What a mistake—the colossal vanity on my part, the conceit of it! I was going to stop war; I hadn't time to play the brother. I've ruined your life and spoiled my own. But forget Varady. He is dead, Pat. Monahan shot him tonight."

"Monahan?" echoed Hardwick.

Ward gave a summary of the events which had ridden to the climax this night—the supposed killing of Varady, the wearying search for Patricia, his tremendous activities and his oppressing loneliness, his love for Becky and the sudden awakening as to what he was in the eyes of the world.

"I didn't mean to be a blackguard, Hardwick. You understand now the hell I was wandering up and down? But don't worry about Monahan. His case will never go to the grand jury. He'll be a hero tomorrow. He thought Varady was trying to get you. It must be fine to have a friend like that. I never had one."

Hardwick's glance roved. He saw the

appeal in Becky's eyes, in the eyes of the woman he loved, in Ward's. There flowed into his mind a calm such as he had not known for two years.

"Supposing," he said, "you take me on for a trial?"

"Do you mean that?" Ward thrust his sister toward Becky.

"Well," said Hardwick with a slow smile, "as we both are elected to the Hall of Nuts—"

Laughter, but it was high and a bit shaky, the quality that always suggests the nearness of tears.

Ward reached out his hand; and the feel of the honest grip that answered his somehow readjusted all that clattering, clanking machinery in his head.

"Folks call me Teddy," said Hardwick. "What's yours?"

"I never had a nickname."

"Did you hear that, Becky? Here's a poor fish that never had a nickname. What'll we call him?"

"He doesn't need any nickname."

"But, Lord! I can't call him Arthur," protested Hardwick.

Here Patricia interposed. "Call him Dodo; that's the nickname I used to give him."

The boom of Hardwick's laughter assured Becky that the old world had plopped back to its accustomed orbit and that the day of whirligigs was gone. Transcendently happy, she cried: "Teddy, which suit-case has my clothes in it?"

"The kitbag."

"I'm soaking wet. And you must be too, Pat. Come along and we'll change. There's hot coffee in the car."

When the bedroom door closed behind them, Becky opened the kitbag and flung the contents upon the paper-covered mattress of the bed. This done, she turned to her companion.

"What a wonderful world this is! When I saw you follow Teddy, I was dumfounded. I couldn't understand. You! Oh, this is wonderful! How beautiful you are!"

The other woman trembled. His sister! Everything in her cried out to crush this girl to her heart and cry over her. Even as this desire rose up in her, she found herself in Becky's arms.

"You care, don't you?" asked Becky in a whisper. There was a sudden pressure. "You'll marry him?"

"Oh, no! You don't understand!"

"I understand everything. Above all I understand that without you he might not have come back to me. The poor boy—carrying this in his heart all the time! You can't run away and leave him now. You just humanly can't. You are free. There isn't any past. The whole world has been reborn. And he needs you, Pat. You'll marry him?"

"Well—if he wants me. I'm too weak to fight any more. But if, in the days to come, anything should arise to make him regret, it will kill me. Oh, Becky, he was so brave and patient! Often, when I was alone, I cried over him. His poor body racked with torture, and his spirit shining in his eyes! I couldn't help caring. . . . You can't understand the abiding horror: whether I was that man's wife or his plaything! And I'll never know. Well—if your brother wants me."

WARD, tolerably done in, sat down on the canvas lounge, filled his pipe and lighted it. He blew a vast cloud of smoke over his head and watched the chimney draught swoop it up. Hardwick threw on a fresh log, and turned.

"Dodo."

"On my word, I'd forgotten that Pat used to call me that," Ward admitted, smiling.

"Well, if ever there was a queer bird, it's you. We mess around a lot, don't we?"

"That keeps us human beings."

"So they used some of your stuff over there?"

"And that thought will always be biting into me. I never shot a gun in all my life. I am and always will be—smile if you must—a man of peace."

"Well," said Hardwick, fumbling in his pocket for his pipe, "deliver me from facing an army of peaceful guys like you! I know the breed. Pale in the gills, wild-eyed, trembling. I had a boy in the troop something like you. He'd mop up half a dozen Jerrys before breakfast, and cry about it all the rest of the day. All right. We'll shove all that stuff into the discard. Do you think she'll forgive me? I was pretty rough."

"If you mention it, Pat will probably fail to understand what you are talking about. But she has a queer idea in her head. It runs in the family to have queer ideas. The shadow of that blackguard Varady—"

"I'll dissipate that, with half a chance. She wont leave me in the lurch on that count."

Hardwick sat down; the two of them smoked and listened to the drumming rain.

"That was a great fight," said Ward.

"You saw it?"

"Yes. Psychology is a strange thing. You can do as you please with your men now."

"I wonder what I'll boil up over next?" said Hardwick, moodily.

"I don't believe you'll boil up any more; all the obstacles—the big ones—have been removed. You don't object to me as a brother-in-law, do you?"

"I should say not!"

"Do you think I have any chance?"

"If you can get Varady out of her head. She'll be fearing the past."

"Hang it, there isn't any past! There's nothing but now. If I can only make her understand that!"

"You really love her?"

"Love her? Man, man, that isn't the question. Does she care for me?"

"I do—Teddy!" came from behind the camp lounge.

THE two men jumped to their feet. They hadn't heard the women come out of the bedroom. A wave of shyness rolled over Hardwick. He could not take Patricia in his arms before Becky and Ward, and he could not very well ask them to step outside into the rain for a minute. He found a way out of his embarrassment.

"I say, Dodo, what do you say to busting a hole in this prohibition thing? I left a kick or two in the cellar when I went away."

"Lead me to it!" cried Ward, who rarely touched liquor. Anything this side of hemlock, in such a moment!

"Then follow me," said Hardwick, picking up a candle.

The two of them went down the creaking cellar stairs, brushing aside the spanning cobwebs.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Hardwick, pausing. "If some bootlegger hasn't made a cache out of this roost! Will you take a squint at all those cases? Holy smoke!"

Ward tore the candle from Hardwick's grasp and inspected a case. Then he roughly computed the number of cases.

"Teddy," he said quietly, "we'll drink it in coffee."

"What's that?" demanded Hardwick, taking down an ax from the shelf.

"Coffee. Because, as an agent from the Department of Justice, I must forbid anybody using an ax on a single case of this particular brand of whisky. Furthermore, we'll spend the rest of the night in your car, a good mile away from these diggings."

"What the devil! Findings is keepings. On top of all the rest of it, you aren't one of those pussyfooters, are you?"

"Not exactly. But I'm too happy to want to die just now. Of all the luck! Hike! We must get the girls away double-quick. The whole carload, about! And think of the blackguard picking out a place like this, knowing you were away and that you never came here except in the spring! Dynamite! Somewhere around fifteen thousand sticks, and all this lightning banging about! Double-quick! Dynamite! Do you hear?"

Hardwick dropped the ax and mounted the stairs, four at a bound, with Ward hard on his heels. A word to the girls was sufficient. Shortly the four of them, in pairs, started across the space between the lodge and Hardwick's car.

Halfway, Hardwick stopped. The rain was nothing to him. It was nothing to Patricia. He did not have to tilt back her head. Her lips were ready for his.

"From now on, always and forever—Pat!"

Then she raised his hand and kissed it.

DAWN. A brown leaf zigzagged lightly to the wet earth. Ward, with detached interest, watched its fall. Sensing a weight against his shoulder, he turned to find Hardwick's head. Becky's brother was sound asleep. Carefully, so as not to disturb the sleeper, Ward peered into the dim tonneau. The two women were also asleep, in each other's arms.

Through the bewildering lattice of scarlet and yellow and green leaves Ward saw the blue sky grow bluer. The red in the east began to fade into gold-beater's leaf. Suddenly the world became as the Valley of Diamonds. Ward saw a squirrel flicker to and fro in a tree near by. Somewhere a bird began to sing. And Ward knew that the morning was come and with it the New Day.

THE END.



The Devil of the Picuris

*A story of another day in
Southwestern America.*

By EDWIN L. SABIN

A YEAR or two ago there customarily sat in a bare little yard of an old-time outskirts adobe of older Santa Fe, New Mexico, an aged, wrinkled señor. All the fair-weather days he sat here, huddled in a chair, with a plaid shawl in lieu of a striped serape over his shoulders; and upon many days Indian visitors from the pueblos north or south bore him respectful company.

Frequently marking him, swart, leathery, gray-locked and silent, and noting his strange guests, I said to myself: "Here is a venerable with history behind his lips." So I vented cautious queries in the neighborhood.

"His name?"

"Miguel Garcia, señor."

"He is very old?"

"*Quién sabe?* Very old, señor."

"He is an Indian?"

"No, no, señor. He is Spanish."

"Then why do the Indians visit him so often?"

"*Sabe Dios, señor.* But he is an old Indian fighter."

"He must have been a good one," thought I. "The Indians do him homage even at this late date." Whereby my curiosity was further piqued, and out of my occasional polite "*Buenos días, señor,*" and felicitation upon the weather, there arrived a day when I might enter the yard and stand uncovered beside his chair. Just in right time, too; for another of his constant visitors shuffled in, looking only straight ahead (as is Indian trait), bringing a quarter of venison wrapped in the hide.

"*Cómo 'stá?*" my old man grunted.

"*Cómo 'stá?*" The Indian gave me one sharp glance and with that dismissed me. I could see that he was a Pueblo, by virtue of his blanket and white leggins, but was darker, more wiry, more savage in lineaments than the average Pueblo; a very Indian of romance.

He shifted the quarter of deer.

"For the Captain," he announced.

My old man called with voice of authority:

"María! Here!"

An ancient dame scuttled from the house, took the venison superciliously delivered to her, and scuttled back.

"*Stá bueno*," my old man shortly acknowledged.

"*Bueno*," the Indian responded. "*Adiós*."

"*Adiós*."

He went as swiftly as he had come.

"A Pueblo, señor?" I asked.

"*Sí*."

"Of Taos? Of Tesuque?"

"No, no. Of Picuris." His tone held testy rebuke, but how was I to know? "Of Picuris where they yet have scalps strung on their roofs. What think you of that?"

"You are an old Indian fighter, I hear, señor."

"*Sí, sí!* I have fought them, in my day; the Apache, the Navajo, the Comanche—all."

"You are an old Indian fighter," I pursued. "Now the Indians visit you, they bring you gifts, you are called Captain by them. The Picuris Pueblos have not been friendly to the white people. There must be a story."

"*Dios!* There is a story." He meditated, rubbing his grizzled chin. "*Así es*. You are an American, but you are civil. Well, some day; maybe some day."

HE was a chronicler not to be hurried; but by dint of salutation and expectancy I at last swung him to an appointment.

At the hour he was not alone. A Pueblo sat upon the ground beside him. The former venison bringer, I opined. And when to my "*Muy buenos días, Señor Capitan*," he fastened his somber hawk eyes upon me, I saw indeed that it was the same stately Pueblo of Picuris.

"You have come to hear the story of the thunder-devil bird?" my old man addressed me, when I had been seated.

"Of the—what, señor?" said I, puzzled. And this put him to cackling; a rare event which apprised me that he was in good humor.

"Oh-ho! What is that, you ask? Not knowing, maybe you will not believe, like all Americans who will not believe that which they do not see."

"Try me, señor," I pleaded. "I wish to

hear of the thunder-devil bird. You have many years; you were there, and you know."

"Many years? *Santo Dios!* I think one hundred. On a cold day I think one thousand," he grumbled. "Yes, I was there. And that you may believe, I have invited another captain (and he indicated the Indian) whose Christian name is Antonio, to hear also. For I am his godfather and he has received the story from his father who was there when I was there. He is the war captain of the Picuris."

The Indian looked upon me and I looked upon him; but he was red and I was white, and we had no words to exchange.

"And because you speak my language and have treated me as if I were somebody and not an old simple, I will tell you," my host proceeded. "Now I must get on with it or I shall have no breath."

Whereat he huddled more warmly, swathed his withered hands in his shawl, and launched his narrative upon the full strong tide of measured, sonorous Spanish.

IT was the second year before the conquest, (he said), and I was then young and active and a buffalo-hunter out of Abiquiu. We traveled far east, twice a year, to hunt the buffalo in the country of the Comanches and to trade the robes and meat with the caravans of the North Americans. All this is nothing, except that it shows I learned to fight the savages.

Well, one night I had a little trouble over a girl at a ball here in Santa Fe, and the family and friends of the young man made me take to the road. His father was a *rico*; there were masses for his soul; God no doubt forgave me, but I knew enough to go.

I went to Picuris, and asked the *cacique* for sanctuary. He ordered me a room of my own. It was with the grandfather of this very Antonio. These tame Indians, as we Spanish call the Pueblos, live comfortably in great houses. They can shut themselves up from their enemies. So here I shut myself up, too, from my enemies; and I became as a son to my new father.

A people very proud and fierce, the Picuris Pueblos; but not many. They numbered only about three hundred. And today—*quién sabe?* But they were strong in hearts, fine warriors and hunters; their men preferred the bow to the hoe. They have Apache blood. They were different from the other Pueblos, so that between

them and even the Taos Pueblo, only two hours by horse, there was scarcely any visiting.

The Pueblos do not like to have their children marry outsiders. But I was told I ought to take a wife, and I married one of my adopted sisters, which was all right. Her Spanish name was Felicia. Her home name was something that means cornsilk. And she had a sacred name given by the Picuris priests, which nobody else knew except her and her mother.

We set up housekeeping. *Dios*, how proud we were when a baby arrived! Now I was a man in earnest. That did not make me a Picuris, though. True, I might dance with the others in the *fiestas*, but I was not admitted to the councils. What was said and done in the *estufas*, the underground chambers of the clans, I had too much sense to ask. When, twice, almost the whole town went away toward the mountains, I was left behind. All I heard, was, that they had gone to pay a visit to the thunder-devil bird. But being Spanish and a Christian I did not care; I laughed to myself at the foolishness of the Picuris.

"What is that thunder-devil bird they go to see?" said I to my little wife.

"Oh, you must not mention it," said she, looking frightened.

"But what is he? Tell me?"

"He is a great bad god. He makes the thunder—that can strike us dead."

"Where does he live?"

"On the Sacred Mountain."

"Did anyone ever see him?"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Did you ever see him?"

"You must not ask."

"Did you see him this time when you went away from me, and came back?"

"You must not ask, you must not ask."

"I have a right to know where my wife goes," said I.

"No. The priests forbid. It is against the laws. Only the priests may speak of the thunder-devil bird. Please do not force me; and please, please ask nothing of anybody, for it will bring you danger."

THAT had been the first time when she had gone, with the others—everybody except the children and a few very old men and women. The second time she did not go, because she was about to be delivered of our baby. And I was glad. That thunder-devil business seemed to make unhappiness among the women. There al-

ways were some of them who cried. Under the blessings of God, I thought, my little wife shall never cry.

Then, one day when our baby had about six months, and from the talk that I had pretended not to hear, I knew that the thunder-devil bird time was arrived again; when I came home from the field I found my little wife crying indeed.

"What is the matter with you?" I asked.

"Do not ask me."

"But I will ask you," I said. "Are you sick?"

"No, no."

"Has somebody harmed you?"

"No, no."

"You are not happy with me?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then don't sit there crying. Is it the thunder-devil time again?"

"Yes, it is the thunder-devil time again, and I am afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Do not ask me. Your food is ready."

That was all I could get out of her, except the tears. After I had eaten and had petted our *niño*, I went out and found my brother Antonio, who was this Antonio's father.

"Let us walk by the river," I said. "I have something to say."

So we pulled our blankets over our heads, in sign that we did not wish to be known; and when we were in the willows out of sight of even the persons standing on the roof-tops (you know, señor, that in the pueblos which look for Montezuma there always is somebody on the roof-tops, morning and evening) I spoke.

"What is all this nonsense about the thunder-devil bird, that is making my wife cry, and makes the other women cry?"

"Hush!" he answered. "It is not for you to know."

"I am a man," said I. "My woman is unhappy. I want to know."

"If you ask questions you will be in danger. You are not a member of any clan, yet. You meddle with sacred matters."

"I am a man," said I again. "I am not afraid of danger. But my woman cries about the thunder-devil bird, and I will know why."

"No man may always know why a woman cries," he said. "And it is forbidden us to talk of the thunder-devil bird."

"You are my brother," I replied. "If my brother will not tell me what I wish to

know, then I will ask and listen until I do find things out. Maybe," I said, "I can make her tell me. She is my wife."

"No." And he gazed all around, frightened. "That would ruin you both. The priests would know—she would have to die, you would be killed. It is better that I tell you a little, so you will understand. Now, if I tell you a little, do you swear by your Christian God, and by all Those Above, that you will never, never reveal one word?"

"I swear, by the Christian God and by Those Above," I promised.

"Or betray me?"

"I swear it, my brother," I promised.

"Let us sit down close together," he bade. "You may ask me questions."

We sat down, close together.

"What is this thunder-devil bird?" I asked.

"He is the thunder-devil bird. A very large bird, who makes the thunder."

"How do you know?"

"We know because we have seen him."

"Where have you seen him?"

"On the mountain."

"The Sacred Mountain?"

"Yes."

"What does he do there?"

"He lives there. He makes the thunder. In the winter he sleeps."

"What kind of a bird?"

"A great bird; a bad god bird—like a bird and a snake both. There is no such other bird anywhere."

"You have seen him, yourself, my brother?"

"Yes, many times."

"By yourself?"

"With the others."

"Is that where the people go, when they leave the pueblo and stay away two days?"

"That is where they go."

"Why?"

"To feed him."

"Do you feed him only twice a year?"

"No. Things are left for him. But twice a year we all must visit him, with sacred food, and the priests make medicine to him so he will be good to us and not send the thunder to burn us up."

"Are the people getting ready to go again?"

"It is the time. We go tomorrow. Tonight we get ready."

"Is that why my wife cries?"

"I cannot tell you. I suppose it is. At thunder-devil bird time women cry."

"Why? Is the way dangerous? Is he such a bad bird?"

"He is a devil bird. He will be bad unless we keep him good toward us. When he is angry with any of us he kills us."

"That sounds foolish to me, my brother," I said.

"No. You do not understand. You have never seen him. But he is there. He has been there many, many years. He was there when my grandfather was a boy. He has always been there. He is stronger than the God of your Spanish priests. They have tried to stop our going, and the thunder came and killed us in our houses."

"Still, you do not tell me why my woman cries now, and why other women cry."

"I do not tell you."

"I will go, and maybe I will find out."

"Go where?"

"With the pueblo people tomorrow."

"My brother caught me by the arm."

"You cannot. They would not let you."

"Why?"

"You are no Picuris."

"I have married a Picuris, and I live here."

"You are white, just the same."

"I will follow. I will look like a Picuris. They would not know me until too late."

"That is impossible. You do not understand. You would be found out, and the priests would have you killed. It is death for any stranger to be caught on the Sacred Mountain."

"For all that," I said, "I do not like to have my wife cry, and I shall learn what makes her cry now at thunder-devil bird time. Some evil threatens her."

"LISTEN," he said. "I love you, my brother; and I love my sister. Some evil does threaten you both. She will accept it, because she is of the Picuris, and it is for the good of the pueblo. But you are Spanish, and you do not believe as we do. Maybe the evil will not happen; I know nothing one way or the other. It all lies with the priests; but the priests are not friendly toward you, yet, and I fear for you. They may try you, to see whether you are going to be Picuris or Spanish. Listen, my brother. Will you swear again by your God and by Those Above, never to betray me if I show you what is in my secret heart?"

"I swear, by my God and by Those Above," I answered.

"I have sometimes thought, to myself,"

he said (he was a wise young man, that Antonio father to this Antonio), "that if we could only get rid of the thunder-devil bird we all would be much better off."

"Yes," I answered. "Women who cry and wont tell are not pleasant things. There seems to be some evil hanging over this pueblo. Have you ever tried getting rid of the thunder-devil bird?"

"No. How can we get rid of him? We feed him and he lives forever. He is strong, and it will take stronger medicine than anything we have to overcome him. And the priests do not wish him out of the way. He is one of the gods; they learn things from him. But, my brother, you may know of a medicine so strong that it will shrivel him up. I have heard from the old men that your priests have worked wonders against devils. They speak names and touch with a cross, and the sick get well. That happened a long time ago, when they first came into our country. The last padre we had here did not do it. Do you know anything about that medicine?"

"The name of God, and the Virgin, and the sign of the cross will conquer any devil," I said.

"Would they conquer the thunder-devil bird?"

"If he is a devil," I said. "Yes, if he is a devil one of our good padres would shrivel him up in a moment."

"But there is no one of the padres here; and besides, our priests would not let him see the thunder-devil bird. They do not wish to lose the thunder-devil bird. Now, my brother, if you know anything about that power, and are brave enough to try, I will help you."

"How?" I asked.

"I will guide you on a trail to the thunder-devil bird place."

"When?"

"Tomorrow early, so you will be there to see him. He comes out only at night, except twice a year when we call him. And if you wait longer you may be too late to save yourself from the evil that is making your wife cry."

"That is good," I said. "I will go and see the thunder-devil and shrivel him up."

"You can work the magic of the Christian priests?" he asked.

"I can speak the words and make the sign. With the help of God and the Holy Mother Mary that will be enough, if he is a devil."

"If it is not enough, then you will die by thunder or by the priests. But I think this, too: If you rid the pueblo of that thunder-devil bird, you will be a great man. I hate to have you go, though, my brother. When you are there, there will be no backing out."

"I will go," said I. "I will go, to stop the women's crying. As for the evil that threatens me and my woman, I ought to know about it."

My brother stood up.

"We must return to the pueblo," he said. "You go by one way and I by another, so we will not be seen together. I will meet you in the morning when the morning star is brightest. You remember where we killed the deer day before yesterday?"

"Yes."

"I will meet you there. And when I have shown you the way I shall leave you, for I have to travel to the thunder-devil bird place with the other people."

"Wait," I asked. "You have not told me what the evil is, or why my little Felicia cries."

"When you have been to the thunder-devil bird place you will know," he answered. Then he went in one direction and I went in another.

THE sun had set, señor, and all the pueblo was getting ready for thunder-devil bird day. Men were singing the thunder-devil chant, and women were wailing, and a drum was beating the call for a meeting in the *estufa*. There was evil in the air—the evil that made my wife cry, and the other women cry. But most I cared about my wife. My brother would not tell me what that evil might be. So I did a reckless thing. I followed into the principal *estufa*, to hear and see what I could.

You know that these *estufas* are sacred chambers where the men gather for rest and to make ceremonies. They are hollowed under ground and surrounded by a wall, at the mouth; and to enter, you climb over by one ladder and down in by another. No outsider is permitted in an *estufa*; the penalty is death. Yes, those priests would have been very glad to catch me. But by help of the dusk and my blanket over my head, I went in with the others. God be thanked, a great crowd of all the men of the pueblo was here, sitting close together in the dark, which made it the safer for me. The only light was that

of a fire. The priests were in front, at the fire, and there were singing and drum beating, belonging to the thunder-devil ceremony.

Well, the priests had things to do, connected with the thunder-devil business; and although I understand the Picuris language and I listened with both ears and at the same time I pretended to sing like the rest, what the priests were doing I could not find out, except that they were praying to their gods to show them the way.

After a long time the chief priest stood up and said: "It is chosen." That is all he said. Then the men began to leave as thick as they had come in, and I went, too. As for me, I had found out nothing, but I was very glad to get away and slip into my house before being caught.

"Where have you been?" my wife asked me.

"I have been walking, so as not to hear you cry," I said.

"I do not mean to drive you out," said she. "You are good to me, but I am afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"I cannot tell you. Perhaps I am foolish. After thunder-devil bird day I shall be all right."

"You fear evil?"

"Yes, I fear evil, but it may not happen."

"I feel an evil but I do not fear it," I said. "I am your man and I will protect you. Do you go away from me tomorrow?"

"I go away. I have to. We all have to. But I shall be back."

"Then I shall go with you. It is not right for a married woman to leave her husband and go off with the other men."

"You cannot. They would not let you. You are not a Picuris."

So I thought best not to tell her that I would be there at the thunder-devil bird place; and I tried to sleep. Outside, all the pueblo was humming with the thunder-devil chant; people hurried about, to and from the *kivas*, which is another name for the *estufas*; and evil seemed to press close.

Pretty soon somebody scratched at the mat which shut the doorway of our room; so I arose and went and asked:

"What is wanted?"

It was one of the priests.

"I want to speak with your woman," he said. "Send her out to me."

My Felicia had heard; for she made a sound in her throat and went out past me. She was gone a little time; and when she came in, it was to crouch in a corner and moan under her shawl. I knew that the evil had fallen.

"What did that priest wish?" I asked.

"No, no!"

"But I ask you."

"No, no!"

"What is the matter, then?"

"No, no!"

"Has the evil fallen?"

"Oh, yes."

"As you feared?"

"Yes."

"Has it something to do with the thunder-devil bird?"

"Yes, yes!"

That was very irritating: a woman who wept and said only, "No, no," and "Yes, yes."

"I am your husband. I say that you shall tell me."

"I cannot. Do not ask."

"Shall I ever know?"

"Yes, you shall know. When it is over with, you shall know."

"Why cannot I know now, to help you?"

"You would not understand. You would ruin us. I must do as the priest says. You cannot help."

AND all the night she moaned under her shawl in the corner, and all the night the thunder-devil chant sounded; and though I was a Christian I now feared the evil thing that had fallen upon us.

Well, early in the morning she was quiet, and breathing as if asleep, with our *niño* in her arms. Then I arose, and took my gun, and slipped away; and if anyone spoke to me I would say that I was going hunting. But the town was tired, at this hour; not yet was there any watcher on the roof-tops, and nobody saw me, for the dawn was scarcely breaking and the morning star was at its brightest.

At the place up the river, where we had killed the deer, I found my brother waiting. It seemed to me that he might have been here many hours, he looked so fierce and heavy-eyed.

"Am I on time?" I asked.

"You are on time, brother. Come; we must travel fast."

We set out. He, too, had arms, of bow and quiver, as if he were going hunting. Travel fast we did, without speaking, to

save our breath until we were clear of the town. Then he said, at last:

"What do you know now of the evil that threatened, brother?"

"It has fallen," I replied. "A priest brought it. My wife cried all night, but she would not tell me. I ask you again, what is it?"

"You shall know."

"When?"

"Tomorrow."

"Where?"

"At the thunder-devil bird place, where we are going."

"On the Sacred Mountain?"

"On the Sacred Mountain."

"You will surely show me, before you leave me?"

"I shall go to the place with you."

"That is good," I said. "I thank you, my brother. We will hasten, so you will not be missed."

"I do not care if I am missed," he said. "I will stay with you and we will conquer the thunder-devil bird or we will die; for the evil has fallen upon me also."

"The evil? The same evil?"

"The same evil. The priests brought it to you because you are a foreigner and a Christian. They brought it to me because I am your brother and they know I love you. Now my woman, and my sister who is your woman, both are crying; and you and I go together to face the thunder-devil bird and undo this evil if we may."

"Then tell me what this evil is that we share," I begged again.

"No. Your medicine must be strong and your heart newly hot. If I tell you now you will throw your strength away. You will be weak and scattered. It is better that you wait for the great moment."

As you know, señor, the Sacred Mountain of the Pueblos lies beyond the pueblo of Taos which is eighteen miles from the pueblo of Picuris; therefore we had more than thirty miles to travel afoot before we reached it by the trail we took. It is a mountain very large and very beautiful, señor; and for many years, back farther than the memory of the oldest Indian, the Pueblos of the country have gone up into the mountain to worship. I think that even yet no white man has visited all of the mountain; there are places kept secret by the Pueblos.

When the morning star was fading in the dawn we were three leagues out; and from a little hill we might look back and

see Picuris. The people had begun to move busily; watchers in white were waiting on the roof-tops for the rising sun; there was smoke of breakfast fires; it did not look like evil, but I remembered the crying of my little Felicia, and I knew that when the sun rose, then all the pueblo would start for the Sacred Mountain and the thunder-devil bird. Was the evil behind us, or was it before? *Sabe Dios*. That was for me to find out.

WELL, we traveled fast, so as to keep ahead out of sight: across the mesas and the arroyos and through among the little hills, with the sun growing hotter and the piñons and the cedars warm and sweet. My brother led far around the great pueblo of Taos, and the Sacred Mountain now stood high and beautiful, wooded clear to the top, you know, señor, and covered all with that blue haze which is the sign of the spirits. It was more distant than it seemed to be, too, so that when at last we reached its base beyond the smaller hills, the sun was nearing noon.

"We will camp at the thunder-devil bird place tonight," my brother said. "And wait. Are you strong?"

"I am strong," said I.

Then we commenced to climb indeed; up, and up, and up, in trees and bushes very thick, and around cliffs and rocks, and across fine parks where there were deer and turkeys. But we did not pause for deer and turkeys. Strange things I saw, señor, as we got higher: rocks painted with sacred signs, and prayer altars, and other medicine tokens left by the Pueblos to win the favor of Those Above. Some were very old. But we did not pause for these, either. After a time we arrived at a bench of rocks, far up on this Sacred Mountain. The bench faced to the south. Grass grew among the rocks, the sun made comfort, and there was a cold spring blessing the spot.

"We have done well," spoke my brother. "Now we can rest, so as to be strong when we reach the thunder-devil bird place."

We drank, and lay down.

"It is far, yet, my brother?" I asked.

"It is far, by the way we go; but not so far as we have come. Look," and he pointed.

My eyes were good, in those days, señor. Now below us we could see all the country

flattened out; there was nothing between us and Picuris. The pueblo of Taos sat small, although its *casas grandes* are five and seven stories high. Picuris we could not see, because its houses mingled with the earth; but what I did see, when he pointed, was the Picuris people coming, like ants at our feet, to the mountain.

"That is they?"

"That is they. Do you feel the evil?"

"No," I answered, "I do not feel the evil now." And it was difficult, señor, to feel any evil, here, in the sun, high on the beautiful mountain, near to God. "Do they bring it?"

"Yes, they bring it. You shall feel it again, and you shall see it," he said. "As for me, I hear it; I hear my woman and my sister crying. But we may rest; we have plenty of time to meet the evil when it comes, and to uncover its face."

WE rested here a little time, until the Picuris ants had disappeared in the foothills; they had traveled more slowly than we, because of the old persons and the women, and also to search the country for the enemy Apaches. When the sun was about an hour lower my brother arose.

"We shall go," he said. "It will not be good to arrive at the thunder-devil bird place in the dark."

Now we climbed again. We climbed to the very top of the mountain, where the trees were shorter and the rocks larger. The sun had set for the world below, but it was still bright up here, when my brother stopped.

"We are here," he whispered.

"At the thunder-devil bird place?"

"Yes, brother."

As soon as the blood cleared out of my eyes, for we had hurried fast, I began to believe that there might be something in this thunder-devil bird business after all. It was a devil place, sure enough: a black lake, not large, señor, sunk into black rock, walling it all about except at the end where we lay. The walls rose forty and fifty feet high, in almost a circle, and hollowed with caves; and at the farther end the mountain top showed, black and gray and snow-patched, in the sun.

The sun shone on it, señor, but not on the little lake, so that the water was like thin tar, and seemed to have no bottom. Back of us were the trees that we had

left; in front of us there were no trees, only the lake, ten feet below us, and beyond the lake, the walls, pitted like spoiled wild honeycomb. We could hear not a sound: the water seemed to have no ripples and no voice; the place had no breeze, no life; the sun had no power. It was a place very black, very dead, and very evil.

At our end the lake narrowed, with a tongue that licked silently into a piece of low shore. The shore was lowest almost opposite us, and ran around this open end from cliffs to cliffs. There were white things scattered on the low shore, and splashes of white upon the cliff faces, and in the air a smell of death—a strange, bad smell, very disagreeable.

"Do you feel anything now, brother?" Antonio asked me, whispering.

"I feel an evil, but you say that our evil is coming," I whispered back.

"You feel the evil that has been done here for the thunder-devil."

"I smell it," I said. "Do I smell it?"

"You smell it. Listen, now. I will tell you. You see that hole, in the wall across the lake and up?"

"Which hole? There are many."

"The large hole, with a shelf in front of it, and a white streak staining the wall face below it."

"I see it."

"That is the house of the thunder-devil bird. He lives inside."

"You know?"

"I know. I have seen him on the shelf. The white stain is his droppings. The stain is broader than it looks to be from here, and the hole is larger than any room at the pueblo. And he himself is greater in size than a buffalo."

"What is his kind?" I asked.

"I cannot tell you. You shall see him for yourself, I think; but I have said that he is part bird and part snake. When he plunges into the lake the water rises and the thunder sounds. He can make the lake overflow down the mountain, the priests say, and there is water enough to cover all the world. So we feed him, that he may not have to hunt."

"Does he always stay here, then?"

"Yes, he stays here while he is content."

"Can he fly?"

"His wings are short, but he can fly on the thunder. The priests have seen him in the clouds. He likes the water best; and some day he may ride the water, when it

overflows to drown the world. He does not see well except in blackness. That is why the lake is black, and the rocks are black, to make the nights black."

"And those other white things. What are they?"

"They are his droppings, and the bones of things that he has eaten. Sometimes he comes to the shore, at night, to eat what he finds. He can cling to the walls like a bat, too, with his wings."

"Now tell me of the evil that threatens us, my brother," I besought.

"No, not yet. You will see. We are here. Let us stay where we are till morning, and Those Above will guard us. I got a good sign when I prayed."

The rocks between which we lay were taller than we. They, and the other rocks, were like rocks that had been melted black in a hot fire. We ate a little dried meat. Now the sun was just touching the mountain top, before he sank entirely. To the world below he had been sunk some time. The lake was growing blacker, and the blackness was rising up the walls, and we could scarcely see the hole in which the thunder-devil lived. Night gathered swiftly here, señor, so that soon we two were lying all in the blackness, and even the mountain top had been swallowed. The sense of evil was very strong. I had little doubt, now, but that it was the place of some devil.

A change of air came blowing toward us from up the lake, and with it that smell. Yes, señor, the breeze carried a stench like the stench of a den of rattlesnakes, truly a devil stench and a death stench, enough to make a man sicken and fear. My brother and I lay pressed close for warmth and company, but we did not speak. It seemed to me that something was about to happen, in the stench and the stillness.

THEN we heard a sound, breaking the night in two. It was a sound that I cannot describe—a harsh sound, harsher than the sound of locked wagon-wheels grating over rocks. That is the only way I can tell you of it, but it was a sound terrible, made by a voice, in the darkness.

I felt my brother tremble.

"The thunder-devil is out," he whispered. "That is he. Listen."

We listened, and smelled the evil stench. Again the thunder-devil called, with his loud croak; and up the lake, toward where

he lived, we heard a scratching in the blackness. That brought out the sweat, señor, cold and sticky. My brother muttered, praying to his Those Above.

"Try your medicine," he said, to me. "But only a little of it. Do not throw it away. We shall need it in the morning."

"In the name of God and the Most Holy Virgin, stay where you are, devil," I cried.

Whether the words reached him I did not know; but we heard nothing more, then.

"He is hungry, and waiting," my brother whispered. "I think that we are safe, for tomorrow he will be fed, and he knows. It is the time. Twice a year, on thunder-devil bird day, he is fed full. It lasts him a long time; his throat is small, and when he is full, he sleeps. He is never allowed to get too hungry."

We lay there. The stars were very bright above, but the darkness around was very thick, and through our blankets the night was very cold and the rocks hard. The stench continued. Once again we heard the thunder-devil call, and he rattled his claws; he was no nearer, though, and seeing that he kept his distance we grew less afraid.

"He is waiting for tomorrow," my brother said.

"Then the people from the pueblo come?"

"At sunrise. And I look to you to shrivel the thunder-devil bird. That is the only way to kill the evil that they bring."

"The evil that threatens and makes our women cry?"

"So I have said. It is in the priests' hands, not far. What we have smelt and heard is only a sign."

Well, the night seemed long, señor, while we lay and tried not to shiver, and the stars slowly passed. I think that we slept a little; but when the darkness paled I was awake, and so was he. Pretty soon we sat up, in our blankets; we ate a few mouthfuls of our meat, and watched the mountain top brighten, until the time when we might see the thunder-devil bird hole. Thanks to God, the day had arrived and we were safe; for when the gray had crept down into the place, we saw nothing but the cliffs and the lake. The thunder-devil bird cave looked empty, all the lake was quiet; he had gone inside his house, away from the day.

The sunshine struck the mountain top

first, and began to flow downward. Then my brother bade:

"Listen!"

I listened, and I heard a singing in the distance. It was the thunder-devil chant. The singing grew louder, and I knew that the pueblo people were coming. My brother sat straighter and threw off his blanket.

"They are coming, and the evil," he said. "Let us be ready to face the evil and the thunder-devil with your medicine. Are you strong?"

"With the help of God I am strong," said I. "I want to know what that evil is."

"You shall know," he answered. "And very soon. And while you work your medicine I will stand by you, for it is an evil that we share, and perhaps Those Above will help us also."

The singing drew nearer, from beyond the end of the lake. And we looked, and just as the sunshine reached us, there they came, into the open, out of the trees, with the priests leading, bearing a canopy, señor. As a procession they came, singing the thunder-devil chant—and in the name of God, señor, that was a sight; for every man and woman was without clothing, as naked as when born.

This was evil enough. I had seen naked Indians before, but never so many at once. However, it was a custom, and not wrong in the sight of their gods, Those Above.

"Shall we wait?" I asked.

"Wait," he said. "You shall see; there will be more for you."

"What is under the canopy?"

"The evil." And the voice of my brother was so fierce that I feared.

THEN I heard the sound of the night. The chanting filled all the place, and the sound had answered, harsh and grating and glad—the call from the thunder-devil. It made me gaze quickly; and I saw him.

He was coming out of his hole, into the sunshine, for the hole faced the east. *Santo Dios*, señor, you may not wish to believe, but he it was, the thunder-devil bird. [I heard the squatted Antonio breathing quickly, all intent, and I felt the truth of the earnest old señor.] A devil indeed, as he emerged, part bird, part snake, just as I had been told. First there came his bird bill and snake head, with round, staring eyes; then his long, scaly snake neck, as long as my body, but thin

and round; then his scaly bird body, on short legs with clawed feet. A body as large as that of a cow, señor, having no tail, and ending suddenly. He called again, opening his mouth, which had teeth; and he flapped his wings—short wings; but he did not fly. He sat there, holding fast on the edge of his shelf, weaving his neck and answering the people, with his eyes (as large as saucers, señor) open to the sun. They had no lids, señor; no lids any more than the eyes of a snake; and whether he could see or not, *quién sabe?* But it was terrible to witness him gazing into the sun.

And such a stench from his body and his breath! The stench of the night, only worse. Truly an evil stench.

"*Santísima!* Guard us!" I cried.

"He hears. He is ready," my brother said in a strange voice. "Look! They are making ready, too, and bringing what you are here to see. Now you shall know the evil thing that is upon us."

When the thunder-devil bird had answered, the people had answered back, shouting; they were singing the chant and dancing like mad, at the end of the lake almost across from us—dancing all except the priests and two who were women. But the two women were flat upon their faces, and the priests were taking out what had been carried under the canopy. Now they held the things up; held them up toward the thunder-devil bird, señor; but no evil things, only two naked little babies, which moved not, as if asleep.

Nombre de Dios! I heard my brother speaking fast.

"Brother! It is the offering to the thunder-devil bird. Your *niño* and my *niño*. Twice a year two babies to the thunder-devil bird. Now you know why the women cry, and what the evil is that has come upon us. Those Above have permitted it, because the people have permitted it, and fear is great and the priests strong. In a moment they will throw the *niños* where the thunder-devil will smell them, out in the water; and they will go. Quick! If your medicine is stronger, shrivel the thunder-devil."

Then I think I turned a little crazy, señor, with all my blood bursting my head and blinding me. I cared nothing for the thunder-devil; I wished only to save those babies from the water. I stood up, and shouted, and not waiting I leaped straight out, down into the lake. Waist deep it

happened to be, at this place, and I held my gun high and, shouting, I plowed across. Right behind me there came my brother, Antonio, who was this Antonio's father—the father of the little Antonio in the arms of a priest. Yes; this Antonio and my own *niño* were to be offered to the thunder-devil bird.

THE people saw us, and they heard us; and the priests knew.

"Kill, kill!" they cried. "A stranger is in the thunder-devil bird place. He shall die, and he who brought him. It is more food for the thunder-devil."

We were in the water and they all were on the shore. The men shouted together; they ran; they picked up rocks, and the thunder-devil was squawking and stenching; but I saw my *niño*, and I saw my wife lifting her face, and I called.

"Friends! You are doing me an evil thing. That is my baby and that is my brother's baby. Shame on you! I am here. You know me. I have lived with you. Be careful now, or some of *you* shall go to feed the thunder-devil."

"Kill, kill!" the priests ordered; and the rocks began to fly.

"Quick, with your medicine! Shrive! them all except yours and mine," Antonio begged, breathing hard beside me.

"Wait!" I shouted again. "Let us talk."

"No. The time has come," said the chief priest. And they raised the little babies, to throw them; but I called, and they saw my gun pointed at them. You remember that I had taken my gun, thanks to God, señor.

"Stop! Listen, or one of you priests shall die and be thunder-devil meat," I warned.

That halted them indeed. The priests had no power against good powder and lead.

"What do you want?" they asked.

"I want the babies. Leave them safe, and go."

"No. That is impossible. The thunder-devil bird has been promised. You see him. He is waiting. It is commanded by Those Above, or we all shall die by the thunder."

"I will shrivel the thunder-devil, then," I said. "He shall live no longer."

At that, señor, the women cried out. *Dios*, how they cried out!

"He will shrivel the thunder-devil! Our

brother says he will shrivel the thunder-devil!"

"He lies," the priests shouted. "Who can shrivel the thunder-devil bird? It is a god. It will live forever. Kill him before the thunder-devil burns us up for listening to the lie. Kill him, and that other who stands beside him, so we can make the sacrifice and go."

But the women cried louder:

"No, no. Let him try. We hate the thunder-devil that takes our babies. It is time that he should die, or else we would die."

And, señor, they ran forward, themselves, and they fought back the men, on the shore, who were stoning us. Yes, it was wonderful to see the women, even the old ones, fighting back the men—and all clothesless, but not ashamed, like animals. Some of the men, too, were shouting for us; and others were angry, the same as the priests.

"Shrive! him quick," spoke Antonio, to me, "if you can; for time is short. I will protect you." And now he also shouted, bending his bow at the priests, "Our brother can do it. I say so. Stand where you are, priests. We are here to destroy the thunder-devil or die."

The thunder-devil had been squawking, as I have said, señor; but now a greater shout yet arose, making me look. *Dios*, he had grown impatient; he had lowered his snake neck, stretching it down from his shelf; and, *caramba*, he was about to plunge!

"Save us! Save us!" the people cried. "He is coming." And the women called: "Shrive! him, brother!" And the men called: "Give him the meat!"

"Meat for the thunder-devil bird," shouted the priests. "Meat he shall have. Back from the shore!"

Todos los santos! The lake was no place for the thunder-devil bird and us, at the same time. I not being a padre, I doubted if any of my words would travel fast enough through that hubbub to catch him; something more certain must be done; and in the instant, while he teetered, I raised my gun—

"*Si, si!*" the squatting Antonio uttered. His black eyes blazed. "*El escopeta!*" Evidently temporal weapons appealed to him more than spiritual. He was war captain.

The old señor paused, to summon: "María! Here! Bring the gun."

The wrinkled María appeared at once, running out with a gun. An ancient, battered fusil it was, its lock tied fast with flinty rawhide. The old señor eagerly seized it.

"This very gun I raised. It is a poor piéce, señor, but it was my best; and a good gun, in those days. I raised it—so." He aimed, strong again with youth. . . .

I called upon all the saints to help the bullet through the thunder-devil's coat of mail, and I fired—Bang!" The imaginary recoil drove him back into his chair. "It was that, or nothing. The priests howled; but the thunder-devil, he howled too. *Mira!* See him! By the will of God the ball had gone home into him. He had fallen over, he flopped—

"*Viva! Muy bien!*" our Antonio panted.

"Thanks to God!" old María exclaimed. "*Stá bueno, buenol*"

"Hurrah!" I encouraged.

He flopped about, screaming and scattering blood and stench so that you could scarcely see the cave. Over the edge of the shelf he slipped; there he hung, on the face of the cliff, with one wing hooked like a bat's into the rock. Like a bat's it was, señor, leathery, and longer than I had thought. He extended from the shelf clear to the water, señor, and his blood hissed when it struck. Then his strength failed him; he let go; he landed with a great splash, he disappeared, and all the lake began to boil red with his struggles. Once his neck writhed out. *En el nombre*, señor, it was time for us to get our legs away. I tell you, in half a minute we were on the shore. That was another scene. The women were dancing and singing—"He has killed the thunder-devil!" they cried. "With his magic bullet he has killed the thunder-devil bird!" The men were staring at the lake; and the priests had their mouths open but nothing to say.

No thunder came; pretty soon the lake quieted. Then my woman and my brother's woman walked straight to the priests. "The thunder-devil is dead," they said. "We will take our babies." So they took them, and breathed upon them, and coaxed them back to life, for they had been put asleep with medicine.

Then the men came to me and one after another grasped my hand. "You are a great man," they said. "The bad god lost his power to you. Stay with us and keep us from further evil."

"No!" said the chief priest. "The thunder-devil is not dead. He was weak. The magic bullet surprised him. He is resting at the bottom of the lake, a mile deep. He will be well in one day, and very hungry. Unless we throw this man in to him he will ride the water down upon us and destroy us all."

"That is a lie," I said. "Who will wait here with me and watch?"

"I will," spoke my brother. And there were others. Then the people went back down to the pueblo; and my brother and I, and our women and three men waited beside the lake for three days. On the third day the carcass of the thunder-devil bird floated to the top. He was still dead, and he stunk very badly, for he was flesh and blood. We took signs from him, and we went down to the town; and from that time to this, señor, I have been well thought of by the Picuris. Yes, as you have seen, and as Antonio, here, who was a baby then and is war captain now, can tell you.

MY old señor settled into his shawl, tired out.

"You are an American, señor," he added. "You read in books. Now, what do you say that the thunder-devil was?"

"I believe, but I cannot say," I answered. "You took a sign?"

"María!" he bade. "The devil sign."

María scuttled in, she scuttled out, and handed something to him. He passed it to me.

"This is one, señor."

It was a fragment of parchment skin, about the size of one's palm, set with scales like mica dollars, and with a round hole through it.

"That," said he, "is where the good God and Mary directed my bullet. The head I could show you at Picuris."

"Perhaps an extinct kind of pterodactyl, señor," I ventured wisely. I tried to find the words. "*Un dragón alado y furioso*—a terrible winged dragon."

"Indeed, yes. So the padre said, to whom I made confession. A devil, sure enough. Now I have finished."

The squatting Antonio arose. He stood tall and straight, older than I had at first supposed.

"*Bueno,*" he muttered. "It is all true. I was there." He shook hands with me. "*Adiós.*" He drew his blanket over his shoulders and stalked out.



Free Lances in Diplomacy

"Young Players in the Old Game" vividly pictures certain thrilling events which those "in the know" will realize are a part of today's amazing history.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

IN a little street up back of the Madeleine, there is a café which has been famous under successive proprietors from the days of Henri Quatre—has possibly dined and wine more celebrated personages during the centuries than any other hostelry in Paris. From the great Navarrese, Sully, and a gentleman of Foix who often shared their escapades, the place became known as Les Trois Gascons. To-day, it is still The Three Gascons—known to every journalist and war-correspondent of any prominence in Europe—known to most *bon vivants*, as well, for the flavor of its cooking, its vintages and the variety of its menu.

In such a place, with its reputation and traditions, the man who sat at a side table in the "L" at the rear of the main dining-room seemed to fit his surroundings perfectly. He blended with the whole outfit. His paunch told of much outlay in the way of rich food; gastronomically, it was a Bradstreet rating. His skin didn't quite exude oil, but one would have struck it

with little drilling. His beard was the sort which grows on a man who lives to eat, and seems to spring like a June crop from well-fertilized soil. His eyeballs protruded slightly—one ventured a guess that the back of his spectacle-lenses must be deeply concave to fit them. His wiry black hair was cut *en brosse*, rather flat on top. His clothes were expensive—perfectly cut—but he wore congress gaiters with square toes. His manner with the waiters was domineering. One inferred that he was accustomed to getting what he wanted instantly, or raising the very deuce about it.

To a couple of men who sat behind him at a corner table, he was a familiar type, and afforded them amused distaste as they watched his mannerisms and eating. They had casually drifted together in a second-class compartment on the way up from Bordeaux—each liking a something in the other which spoke, first, of war-service, and then of special details requiring initiative and exceptional ability. There had been no reference to this until they sat

down in the Trois Gascons to eat their first Paris dinner together. Then the Melbourne man asked, smilingly:

"Intelligence Department?"

"Well, you might call it that. Detached service in the 'Communications' up Flanders way—and then for a bit around Armentières. Took you for the same branch—not?"

"Aye. We were at Gallipoli first, as you know; then I was ordered north of Salonika with my battery, and detached to the 'Intelligence' because I had a bit of luck over at the Dardanelles. Rotten mess, the whole bloody business! I'd not care to go through it again for any amount of money—fancy all our chaps feel the same way. And yet, there was something in the Intelligence game which rather caught my fancy. It was pitting one's brains, you know, against Fritz, and outplaying him whenever it was possible. It's only fair to say he scored occasionally, too; but, as a rule, he lacked imagination. Rather a pity there's nothing of the sort in civil life. The ordinary run of detective work is another matter altogether—one is dealing, in that, merely with criminals who are out for nothing but robbery or murder. Blocking them is but an individual case of safeguarding the public—"

"There's the Diplomatic Service—you know. Many of the same problems we had in the Intelligence—problems of national or international scope in their general effect. Which reminds me: I've a relative here in Europe who has the reputation of disliking anything in the way of political or state affairs, yet has gone steadily up the ladder of government rewards for services which nobody appears quite to understand. It has been my private belief for some time that both he and his wife have done a good bit more in the way of secret diplomacy than they're willing to admit; but of course there's no shadow of proof in that direction. They have a rather famous little house in Paris—Avenue de Neuilly, I think—but I've never looked them up."

"Now that's a bit odd! I also have a relative who'd answer that description very closely and who lives here on the same street when in Paris. Mind if I ask your first name, old chap?"

"Allan—Allan Trevor Manners, if you want the whole of it."

"I fancied it would be something like that—your branch settled in Montreal and then Winnipeg, not? Descendants of a

younger son? Only reason I happen to know that much is because my relative married a Trevór. I'm Carlton Tremaine. The Countess is my cousin."

"By Jove! What an odd coincidence—our drifting together in this way. I've heard she's a most charming woman—her pictures in the newspapers certainly give that impression."

"Yes, she has that reputation. I've never met her. Always seemed to me rather poor taste chasing up one's wealthy relatives—and they're swells, no getting around that. Hello! I say! There's that decent chap who was in our compartment at Bordeaux and got out at Tours! Shall we ask him to join us?"

THE newcomer was dressed in excellent taste but inconspicuously. His features were handsome in repose, yet seemed capable of a great variety of expressions, according to his mood. The invitation to join them apparently pleased him, but he excused himself for a few moments while he had a talk in excellent French with Madame Goncourt in the bureau—and it was during this time that the pair in the corner had their attention drawn to the gastronomic exhibition their neighbor was giving at the next table. When their new acquaintance returned, they drew his attention also to the man, by looks and nudges. Then they introduced themselves. To their amazement, their friend asked with a laugh if Manners were not from Winnipeg, and Tremaine from Melbourne?

"Nothing so mysterious about it, gentlemen! I'm related to the family myself—know something of the Australian and Canadian connections. Aside from that, I fancy there's some resemblance to both families in you. Have you called upon the Countess since your arrival? She's in Paris now, you know—just returned from India." There was an embarrassing pause for a moment—then Manners said, with apologetic candor:

"Fact is, we'd neither of us thought of calling. Never happened to meet that branch of the family, and knew of no particular reason why we should look them up. I fancy we've both sufficient incomes to keep us going comfortably, but I for one am not wealthy by a lot, and those people are swells—"

"And you fancy they'd have some of the mannerisms and ideas which you found offensive in the English during the war?"

"Well, frankly, I did get a bit fed up on being considered merely a 'Colonial'—an 'outlander'—treated as if we were from that fact less educated, or lacking in the same breeding as the English. The people in Britain should wake up to the fact that Canada and Australia and South Africa are nations, today, which remain parts of the British Empire merely for defensive and commercial reasons with possibly a bit of sentiment thrown in. We're not in the least obliged to remain, you know, if we decide it is for our advantage to go it alone. In fact, we are in much the same position that the people of the United States would have been had they postponed their Revolution to about 1870. We are really independent nations with highly civilized populations and many great cities; our present status with England is really that of a defensive alliance rather than that of dependent States. The conference of Premiers has cleared the air a good bit upon this point. It is now understood that we mean to insist upon political coöperation with the United States because our interests and those of the Americans are mutually interdependent in many different cases. And if the British Government does not recognize our individual interests in the matter—why, we'll jolly well look after our own foreign affairs, that's all!"

"Hmph! You'll have no quarrel either with the Earl or the Countess upon that point! He was born in Boston, in the shadow of Bunker Hill and is an American citizen to this day. He inherited the Trevor baronetcy simply because he happened to be the heir to both title and estates, but the subsequent honors conferred upon him by the Crown have been in recognition of valuable services, just the same as the knighting of Maxim, General Pershing, and many other Americans. As for Countess Nan, she was born in India, of mixed Scotch and American parentage; and you'll not find in either of them the mannerisms or the narrower point of view which are typical with many of the English. In a broad way, they are both keen for the closest possible relations between all English-speaking peoples, because they believe that world-peace and the safety of civilization depend upon some such alliance. Fully eighty per cent of the Americans, Canadians, Australians and South Africans believe the same thing. But that doesn't by any means prove that either

Americans or the outlying states of the British Empire approve of all the policies or actions of the British Government in England. One simply doesn't meddle upon such points because they don't immediately concern one's own State—and each has its own problems at home. Really, I think you'd like our mutual relatives. Why not call, out there in the Avenue de Neuilly, this evening? Give you my word you'll not regret it!"

IN another moment or two, their new acquaintance left them and they fell to discussing some of the points he had raised, and presently came to an agreement that they would call upon their kinswoman that evening just as a matter of courtesy. The visit need not be repeated unless the prospective acquaintance seemed likely to be a pleasant one. They were just ordering coffee when their attention was again directed to the personage at the neighboring table. With his fork midway from plate to mouth, he was staring at a man who had just come into the room and was looking about as if in search of some one. With eyes almost popping out of his head, the epicure slowly laid down his fork, whipped the napkin-end from his buttonhole and upheaved his mass of flesh from the chair. As the stranger approached, his heels clicked together—he bowed from the waist like a jackknife—and then stood awaiting the other man's pleasure with an expression of absolute stolidity upon his face. For an individual whose manner had been about the limit in the way of arrogance a moment before, the change was almost unbelievable. As for the other—his manner was that of a brutal employer to a servant whom he considered in the cattle family. Without acknowledging the bow or greeting in any way, he seated himself at the other side of the table, drew off his silk gloves in a leisurely manner and said, in a tone so low that it couldn't have been overheard:

"Sit down, fool! You attract attention—which is most undesirable! Order for me! Your taste in food is good, even if you have no brains! Meanwhile, you will pay close attention. If you misunderstand anything I say—so much the worse for you!"

"Ja, Excellenz! I will pay close attention."

"See that you do! You arrived from New York this morning according to my

cabled order—and registered under an assumed name at a certain hotel according to instructions, eh? It was dangerous to attempt getting certain papers into your hands in the States, and we found that other information was obtainable only here in Paris. Senator Gwynnell of the Ways and Means Committee is here for two or three weeks, studying Continental exports to the United States in order to make a report upon which certain sections of the new American Tariff will be worked out. That report will carry a good deal of weight, as he is considered the expert of the Committee. Several members of both Senate and House will accept his opinion without much question. There are also in Europe at this moment four Congressmen and two other Senators who have 'paired' their votes with others at home in order to make investigations over here for their Government. Of those now in Washington, there are fifteen concerning whom we have been able to dig up a mass of compromising information which, undoubtedly, can be used when the proper time comes. This information is now in the possession of Hilda Thorsberg, who will arrive at Havre on the *France* Saturday night or Sunday morning. She will, of course, deliver the papers only to me—but I may be called to Berlin at any moment and will instruct her to place them in your hands at a time and place which we will agree upon later. I have plans in regard to Gwynnell and the other Americans which can scarcely fail. You will not return to New York until they have been tried out and the information placed in your hands—then you will use what you have in the only way your brain seems good for. You have ability in bringing pressure to bear upon men and women without rendering yourself actually liable to arrest. Well, the High Command honors you by making use of that ability. That's all! You have been suitably rewarded before and will be again. Of course any attempt at betrayal will be dealt with in the usual manner." A shudder rippled along the folds of fat in the pop-eyed epicure's back—evidently "the usual manner" was vivid in his imagination as something rather worse than "lingering—with boiling oil." Manners saw the shudder—and whispered to the Australian:

"By Jove! Did you notice that? The chap has that beggar terrorized! Did you catch anything of what he's been saying?"

"A few words, here and there. My hearing is rather keen. But I got more of it from the movements of his lips—specialized a bit in lip-reading, you know, in the Army Intelligence. Sort of a jumble without the whole thing—but I fancy those bounders will put something over on the Americans if their scheme works out as the quieter one has planned it. Typical all over, isn't he! Anyone in a subordinate position to him is simply 'cattle'—ought to be thankful he's allowed to live at all and carry out the orders of those 'higher up.' And he passes it on to those below him, mind you! Notice Whiskers' manner with the waiter before Excellenz came in—and how it oozed out of him like a punctured balloon when it was his turn to crawl? Faugh! That sort of a government system makes a man sick! What sort of brain must a human being have to stand for it? Manners had been glancing from his friend to the quiet Berliner, and back again.

"I SAY, Tremaine! Ever try any Intelligence work in disguise?"

"Oh, aye. Came down with a plane a hundred miles inside enemy lines and stayed there two weeks as a staff *Hauptmann* of artillery. Why do you ask?"

"Well—nobody looking at you and that chap would see the slightest resemblance in coloring or features. But you're the same height to a hair, I'd say—about the same weight and build—same general type of cranial formation. If you had any reason for trying the experiment, it seems to me you could impersonate him for a bit and get away with it. Eh?"

"I had some such idea myself—though I fancy the chap would take it as anything but a joke if I tried it. Of course the war is over and military penalties are no longer excusable, but that bird would be after my blood if he discovered me impersonating him! Might be a bit dangerous, eh?"

"Oh, yes—that would be part of the game of course. Do you know, that hairy one's face is oddly familiar to me—or seems to be. Can't place him at all! And yet I'm dead sure I've seen him somewhere—"

"Perhaps I can jog your memory a bit. I came out from Melbourne this time by way of San Francisco and New York—stopped to see a few chaps of our old division who have gone into business there. They pointed out this fellow, or his double,

in a restaurant, one day, as a specimen of the naturalized American citizen who was so damned loyal to the United States that he put fifty thousand dollars into Liberty Bonds and went about addressing church meetings—but the Secret Service over there had everything but conclusive proof that he furnished the chemicals for a number of bomb outrages before the United States came into the war. If it's the same man, he is Adolf Groenberg—one of the largest chemical importers in America—has branch houses in South America and Australia, too."

"Hmph! You're quite right! I recall him now, perfectly. They captured a squad of us at Ypres—and for some crazy reason sent me to Hamburg. This chap, Groenberg, came in by way of Switzerland and was treated with considerable respect by officers and civilians alike in Hamburg—came on business of course, the United States being at peace with Germany, but he was acting in their interests all the time. You're welcome to give your friends in New York that information if anything's likely to be done about it. Head of a chemical house, you say? Hmm—such a house would be handling dyes, would they not? These Senators and Congressmen they mentioned were on the Ways and Means Committee—not? I wonder, now, how much difference it would make to our American friends if their new tariff bill should admit foreign dyes free?"

"Ruin every American dye-worker in the country, wouldn't it? I was told they'd spent hundreds of millions in developing the industry during the war."

"Then they'll certainly not put foreign dyes on the free-list! There'll be a sufficient embargo to protect the American plants or at least put them on equal terms."

"Unless—? Intimidation is being carried pretty far you know—these days. There are hundreds of ways in which pressure may be brought to bear upon a man."

"Depends somewhat upon the breed. I'd not waste my time trying it on some chaps I've known!"

THAT evening, they presented themselves at the Maison Dyvnaint in the Avenue de Neuilly and were charmed with the Countess, whose face seemed inexplicably familiar to them. At first, they laid it to the many pictures they had seen of her in the gazettes and Sunday supple-

ments—then a peculiar smile and some tone of her voice brought them amazed understanding. Before other guests arrived, she explained:

"I frequently went about in uniform during the war and have had occasion at other times, for excellent reasons, to wear men's clothes. There was a general family resemblance about you two which I noticed in the train-compartment—enough to make me ask a few questions at your hotel when you arrived in Paris. The names, of course, settled all doubts in my mind. We've followed the records of both you boys with much interest and often wondered why you didn't look us up when you happened to be in the same city. After this, I hope you'll make yourselves at home in any of our houses. Now come into the drawing-room! There are a couple of old friends whom I wish you to meet—perhaps you'll understand why, some day."

The friends she mentioned proved to be a Mr. Raymond Carter—formerly *chargé d'affaires* at the American Embassy in Paris—and a famous Italian nobleman, the Cavaliere Scarpia, who had recently inherited other titles as well but chose to be known by the simpler one. Scarpia they'd heard of as a world-wide celebrity who was said to have so much political data bottled up in his polished ivory skull that he could overthrow most any European government if he talked five minutes for publication—and they had a pretty shrewd idea that he had been responsible for many a political *coup* in recent years. Mr. Carter struck them merely as a quiet dignified man of perhaps forty-five or fifty, with graying hair and moustache—a most creditable representative of the United States, whose duties at the Embassy had probably been largely routine—until he dropped a remark betraying so wide a knowledge of those international undercurrents which seldom get into the newspapers that it opened their eyes to the sort of man he might really be. Encouraged by his friendly manner, Tremaine was prompted to ask:

"Are your American politics ever influenced materially by things which happen over here in Europe, Mr. Carter? I mean by that, occurrences which are brought about with that purpose directly in view?" Carter smiled as if the question were naïve.

"Mr. Tremaine, you might be somewhat amazed to know the extent to which some of your Australian elections have

been influenced by prearranged happenings in other parts of the world. Secret diplomacy knows no limits or confinement to any one area. There are forces incessantly at work over here to swerve the trend of American legislation this way or that in the interests of European nations—companies or even influential individuals. I am no longer connected with our Embassy here, though the Ambassadorship was offered me in recognition of past services—largely because I think I can be of even greater service to our Government here as merely a private individual living on a comfortable income of my own."

"Er—might one hazard a possibly impertinent guess, sir, that you are referring to what might be termed 'diplomatic secret service?' The question is entirely confidential, of course."

"That term might cover it if a man were in the Government employ—which I am not. Washington maintains a Secret Service in many of its Cabinet Departments, with salaried operatives; but the changes in administration every few years make it difficult if not impossible to retain men who have had the lifelong experience in international affairs to be really efficient in such capacity. So work of that sort when done for us is usually a loyal service given without remuneration by men of independent means who can afford to devote their time to it. You were both in the 'Army Intelligence' and, because of that, can readily understand that there are certain acts of immense value to one's Government which cannot be recognized by it for the reason that they are frequently outside the statute laws of this or that country—actionable, you know, with rather severe penalties if caught, yet none the less justifiable in the long run from the unquestionable benefit to one's own country. Now—that sort of thing cannot be publicly rewarded by any government. Even a special fund voted by Congress for 'special service not designated' is always subject to public inquiry and investigation if somebody or some newspaper gets suspicious and demands it."

"Then—you would say, sir, that there is no remuneration in that sort of work beyond whatever satisfaction there might be to a man of independent income in 'playing the game?'"

"If one is able only to score occasionally—none. And the game cannot be recommended to persons of nervous tem-

perament. On the other hand,—if one has a natural gift for such work and has sufficiently keen wits to outplay the diplomats of other nations—he sometimes acquires information which may be used speculatively in a perfectly legitimate way. Take our good friend, Scarpia, for example. He has never been in the Diplomatic Service,—he is perhaps the closest-mouthed man in Europe. Twenty-five years ago, his entire income was probably under twenty thousand lire a year. Nobody knows what he is worth today—but he impresses one as having far more than a sufficient income for his needs. He has rendered gratuitous services to various nations—but never one which was against the best interests of Italy. Yet no government has ever paid him a lira that I know of—or added to his inherited titles. Very likely he may have bought stock shares or various bonds when some turn of international affairs gave him reason to believe them a good investment—but there are very few men who don't do that. He has always played the game in his own unknown way, purely for the love of pitting his wits against those of the most brilliant diplomats in Europe—never with the idea of possible reward. It is feared that memoirs of his may have been deposited in a safe place, to be published after his death—which is why every chancellery in Europe is most anxious to have him outlive Methuselah. He's upwards of eighty, now—but you'd not take him to be within fifteen years of that at the most."

BOTH of the younger men had followed Carter's remarks with absorbing interest—and, as occasional glances at one another indicated, were fast arriving at a mutual understanding that the sort of work he implied was more to their liking than anything else which had offered since their demobilization. They saw that one didn't get into it by taking a civil-service examination and requesting such employment from any government—because there was no such recognized employment to be had. It was purely a free-lance proposition, offering a wide variety of adventure, intrigue, *finesse*, with a spice of danger thrown in. But Manners had an idea that, among men and women who became absorbed in such a game, there would be a certain amount of reciprocal service from the obvious advantage of such coöperation—which prompted a question to the American:

"Suppose, Mr. Carter, that a Canadian or Australian happened upon the track of something dangerous to the United States and should have the luck to block it—partly or entirely? What then?"

"Well—for one thing—he might rest assured that the service would become known to every American in the game, and not forgotten in case one of them happened upon something against Canadian or Australian interests. It sometimes occurs that a citizen of some other country has a better chance to block such plots than Americans themselves, because he wouldn't be supposed to have any personal interest in it. We live in a pretty selfish world—asking, usually, 'what does this get *me*?' before taking any definite action. Consequently, when some outsider appears to be meddling in what doesn't immediately concern him, we're apt to conclude that it's merely unconscious accident upon his part, and pay little attention to him."

"Er—do you happen to know Senator Gwynnell, Mr. Carter?"

"Very well, indeed—we are old friends."

"Would you be willing to introduce us with the suggestion that what we say is usually trustworthy—that our experience couldn't have been obtained unless we had proved ourselves so?"

"I'll be pleased to do so—and to a few other Americans as well. You gentlemen both have honorable records which entirely warrant such a recommendation. Of course, your request suggests to me that you may have happened upon something possibly dangerous to the Senator. If you can avert any such danger, neither of us is likely to forget it, I assure you."

On the way back to their hotel, the two young men fell to discussing ways and means by which they might block Groenberg's game in regard to the American Congressmen, whatever it might happen to be. After some figuring, it was decided that Manners—who knew the captain and purser of the *France*—should send a radio message to them and have Madame Hilda Thorsberg pointed out to him when the ship reached Havre, then keep her under as close observation as possible. Tremaine, meanwhile, was to be in Senator Gwynnell's immediate neighborhood as much as he could.

"Can't very well tell the chap that he's to mind his eye whenever Groenberg and that other are about, you know! He'd be sure to resent it—tell me he was quite

able to look out for himself and all that—wish to know what business it was of mine. But we should be able to spot those bounders whenever they're in his company and see what they're up to. Not?"

"Hmm—I scarcely think it will prove as simple a matter as that. They'll not try anything like abduction or violence, because they'll want his vote in the Senate if it happens to favor their interests, or find some method of coercion if it doesn't. But, unquestionably, he'd be of no use to them dead or missing. Well—we must guess how they can possibly influence a man like that. I fancy he'd strike anyone who tried to buy his vote—floor him without warning. That being the case, how could one 'persuade' him to change? It would have to be some consideration that would put a man of honor in an almost impossible position—not? What could those two Boches do in that line?"

"Oh, it's not so difficult to trap almost any decent chap into a false position if the thing is carefully planned and takes him sufficiently unawares—but a man of the Senator's caliber would be likely to smash something before they got through with him, I fancy."

NOW, although knowing that four or five of the American statesmen in Paris were being seriously plotted against, the two ex-officers were in a delicate position as far as warning them was concerned. They could make no definite charges because they were in the dark as to what methods were being considered by the plotters. It's easy enough to tell a man that Bill Jones means to do him up and is "bad medicine" generally—but when he asks you "How? . . . In what way?" and you say you haven't the faintest idea, your charges are not convincing. Sympathy is rather with the possibly maligned Bill Jones. So it was not in the least surprising or preventable when the Senator actually did walk open-eyed into a trap that would have caught all but the hundredth man. Tremaine found it a simple matter, with Raymond Carter's assistance, to have himself put up at all the clubs frequented by the American statesmen—and made himself popular with all of them as a likable representative of a sister commonwealth. Gwynnell and the others saw and talked with him several times each day, as also did the chemical magnate Groenberg, and the Berliner Von Ebeling,

who were members of the same clubs. As far as Tremaine could see, no attempts were yet being made to go any farther with the visiting Americans than to cultivate their acquaintance and extend a number of perfectly obvious courtesies—nothing which gave the slightest grounds for warning any of the statesmen. But he couldn't anticipate and prevent the Senator's acceptance of an invitation from a friend introduced by Von Ebeling to spend an evening at a private club in one of the *faubourgs* to meet and dine with a few distinguished Europeans—a club to which Tremaine could not have obtained access unless disguised as a German or French socialist.

The dinner was one of the best Gwynnell had ever eaten. Two or three of the other guests were men whose reputation extended even to the United States as commercial and political leaders. They, of course, had no suspicion of what was afoot and had been invited merely to give the party a coloring of ultra-respectability. After dinner, cards were proposed, Gwynnell being asked to name his favorite game. As the Senator is probably one of the best poker-players in Washington, he suggested a little game of draw—feeling perfectly competent to hold up his end of it—and the others laughingly agreed, provided some reasonable limit were placed upon the betting.

As the game progressed, with varying fortunes, one of the celebrities dropped out after losing a couple of thousand francs. Then Gwynnell began to win steadily, another celebrity and Groenberg being the chief contributors, until both of the guests who were not in the plot dropped out. They didn't leave the club immediately, but sat watching the play for another half-hour or so. Gwynnell couldn't have said just when they did leave—was under the impression that both were still in the room when the astounding climax was sprung upon him.

Von Ebeling had been apparently growing sour over his losses—saying he never saw such luck as the Senator's—but it was another man who soon began making pointed remarks about the game. By this time, Gwynnell himself was beginning to suspect that there was something wrong, but he couldn't discover anything suspicious in the way the other players handled the cards—and many of the remarkable hands he held came to him

when he was dealing. He noticed, several times, that his opponents threw down their cards without calling him, and began to suspect that some of them could have beaten what he actually held. But this might be altogether an exhibition of "cold feet" at the psychological moment. Finally—he had about decided to say that he didn't like to play for anything but a small limit and refuse to take his winnings—when the bad-loser at his left suddenly grasped his arm and apparently drew three aces and four kings from his left coat-sleeve. Another player, seeing this, grasped the Senator's right arm—shaking a number of cards out of the sleeve upon the table and floor before he could recover from the shock of this amazing occurrence. Then—there was dead silence for a moment—after which the bad-loser remarked:

"Gentlemen—I have lost twenty thousand francs in this game. I cannot, of course, take them *all* from this scoundrel's winnings—so I suggest that his stacks be divided equally among the losers. The other two gentlemen, obviously, are entitled to keep what they have won, as there is no evidence that they have not been playing a strictly honorable game."

This, however, the remaining two winners refused to do, keeping merely the sums they'd had when they sat down to play, and turning over the rest to be divided as nearly as possible according to what each of the others had lost. Then, one by one, the players left the room, looking silently at the Senator with unspeakable contempt as they went. When none remained but Von Ebeling's friend, who had introduced him at the club, he suggested with frigid dignity that he would accompany the Senator to his hotel—which he did without exchanging half a dozen words, and left him there.

G WYNNELL was stunned. He realized, of course, that it was a frame-up—but could see no reason for it. That would develop later, undoubtedly; but he slept poorly that night trying to anticipate and guard against it if possible. For most of the next day, nothing happened. The Senator lunched at one of the clubs to which he had been given a card and imagined that the waiter was insolent to him—was quite sure that one or two members whom he had casually met were very cool in their manner, and avoided him. Before he left the building, one of the

previous night's players cut him dead in the foyer. Altogether, the atmosphere in Paris just then was enough to frazzle the nerves of a man ordinarily self-controlled and cool-headed. When dining at a famous café that evening with one of the Congressmen, he was approached by Von Ebeling—who suggested a confidential talk, an hour later, in the Senator's room at his hotel. His manner was dignified—not friendly—but sufficiently civil to give his victim the impression that he might get to the bottom of the thing at last. So he agreed—and was in his room when his caller was shown up by one of the pages. Von Ebeling wasted no time in an exchange of courtesies:

"You've doubtless anticipated, sir, that I have something to say concerning last night's occurrence. Of course, none of us care to continue an acquaintance with you, and the majority are determined to publish the story in the daily papers—see that the press syndicates spread it over the United States pretty thoroughly. As far as you personally are concerned, we all favor such a course. But there is another side to it which makes us hesitate. The thing reflects pretty badly upon at least three of us who were responsible for you. We introduced you to members of that club. If the story gets out, it raises some question as to the sort of men *we* are. Fortunately, every man in that room knows us well—knows that our personal honor has never been questioned. For these considerations, they have agreed to withhold action of any sort for a day or two on our account, though M'sieur Reich—who is part-owner in a leading journal—has the story now in type and means to publish it unless we can persuade him against such a course. We would prefer not to have him do it, for the reasons I have stated—but he considers it a public duty to expose men of your type and we've had much difficulty in restraining him for the present. He finally agreed that if you would do a certain thing which would be a service to him, he would kill the story and undertake to keep the other gentlemen, who are all friends of his, from spreading it." A grim smile wrinkled the corners of the Senator's mouth as he drew a cigar from his case and lighted it—with-out offering one to his caller.

"I kinda thought we'd get around to something like this before long, Von Ebeling! Of course the whole thing is a frame-

up—I was beginning to suspect it and about to throw my winnings into the pot when you scoundrels sprung it on me—"

"That sort of talk wont get you anywhere, Gwynnell! You would naturally try to sneak out of it by making such a charge, but there were too many witnesses—some of the most prominent men in Europe among them! It is possible, of course, that you have so little sense of honor that you have no conception of what such a story will do to you everywhere—at home and abroad—it means ostracism, resignation from the Senate, contempt from everyone—"

"I KNOW what it *might* mean a damned sight better than you do, Von Ebeling! Of course I don't like it. Well—what's your price to hush the thing up so that it never gets out—to give me a satisfactory *guarantee* that it will never get out? We're not playing marbles, now! You've got me in a hole—temporarily. What price?"

"Not *mine*, if you please—I wouldn't deal with you! But M'sieur Reich, who is Swiss, is very largely interested in dye-manufacturing, besides his newspaper interests. You Americans, for all your experimenting, have not yet succeeded in equaling the dyes made over here. They are a necessity in many lines of your business. Your manufacturers must have them at any price. A duty on them is merely an additional tax upon your own people; and you will find that quite a majority do not wish it. So M'sieur Reich says that if you are willing to use your vote and influence toward placing all European dyes upon the free-list—"

"Say, Von Ebeling—you've been pretty insulting since you came into my room, but I appreciate the fact that it's merely a part of your game. But you're talking, now, in a way to get yourself beaten up until there isn't much more'n jelly left of you! What you may do to my personal reputation is *one* thing. My vote and whatever influence I may have in the United States Senate are quite different matters. You'll convey my compliments to your fellow-scoundrel, Reich, and tell him he can go to hell! Now get out of my room before I kick you out—and do your damndest with that card story! Perhaps I'll find a way to put that in a somewhat different light—but don't speak to *me* again unless you are looking for trouble! Get me?"

VON EBELING left the room in a dignified but ominous manner—a smile on his face which Gwynnell didn't like at all. The Senator lighted a fresh cigar and sat down to do some concentrated thinking. The position in which he found himself after many years of honorable career was thoroughly disheartening. He had been a public character long enough to appreciate thoroughly how such a story would spread, and the ostracism it would cause. Gambling in itself is considered a vice by the great mass of people—no matter whether it is done for harmless amusement or not. But most men in public life do it more or less without much loss of respect. To gamble for large stakes and *cheat*, however, is so despicable that it has always been a cause for ostracism—and justly so. While Gwynnell was thinking back over his career—realizing what a pitiful climax to it he was probably facing—there came a knock at his door. The young Australian, Tremaine, was standing outside—and asked if he might come in for a little while. It was on the tip of the Senator's tongue to refuse, with the excuse of work which must be finished that night—he was in no mood for chat with even a likable young fellow of thirty—but Tremaine casually remarked, in a low tone:

"Has that boulder, Von Ebeling, been annoying you, Senator? Possibly I can offer a suggestion or two in regard to him and Groenberg."

"Eh? What's that? Say, boy, do you know anything about that skunk?"

"Why, rather. Enough, I fancy, to make him behave if he has done or said anything impolite."

"The devil you do! Hmph! Know that he's a crook?"

"Oh—quite so!"

"Then why in hell didn't you drop a hint to me before he got his teeth in my throat?"

"H-m-m—bad as *that*, eh? I've been upon the point of warning you half a dozen times, sir, but against *what* I didn't know. And you'd not have listened to me without some definite charge. However, we'd best not waste time going into that now. The point is, what has the boulder *done*? How can we bring him to book in the shortest possible time? Would you care to give me all the details? I fancy that Manners and I can almost certainly draw Von Ebeling's teeth."

"Good Lord, son—if you *can*—well—you may both ask me for any mortal thing in reason!"

From long practice in public speaking and writing, the Senator was able to clarify his recollections of the previous evening and give a concise account of what had happened, including his realization, just a few minutes too late, of what he was up against. The story drew a low whistle from the Australian.

"My word, sir, that was deucedly well planned! Almost impossible to foresee and guard against! Of course you might have refused to play cards with them—but no gentleman in such a position would. He might watch a bit for his own protection to see that the other chaps were playing a straight game, but it would never occur to him that he could be so conclusively proved a cheat, himself, when he knew his every action was thoroughly honorable. Well, my suggestion is that you go with Manners and me and your Ambassador to call upon the French Premier. You tell him your story and we'll tell ours—which is that we actually overheard Von Ebeling and Groenberg plotting in the Café des Trois Gascons to compromise you and other American statesmen, in ways not mentioned at the time, in order to force your political influence in their favor. Then I suggest publishing both your story and ours in the next edition of *Le Matin*, properly attested by your Ambassador and the Premier. In that way, it will not be necessary to publish our names—which we naturally prefer not to do. It is quite permissible for names of witnesses to be withheld from publication if they are known to and vouched for by the Government. From what we know of that crowd, *they'll* not publish that story until they have first spread vague hints about the clubs which will have the effect of making a good many people decidedly cool when you meet them, without knowing anything definite against you. Then when you're getting a taste of what the story is sure to do, they'll approach you again and see if you're in a more receptive frame of mind. So that I'm quite sure you'll steal a march on them by publishing your own side of it tomorrow. It'll never occur to them that you've the nerve to do that, or that you've witnesses to the truth of what you say."

That night, Senator Gwynnell slept like a baby—and his story in the Paris papers, next day, created a sensation that

was talked over in the clubs for many weeks—Gwynnell's public record being such that few doubted for a moment the truth of his statements. Von Ebeling and Groenberg immediately brought suits against him for libel—but at a menacing hint from the French Government, allowed them to lapse by default.

LET us now go back to Captain Manners and the day when the *France* reached Havre. He went out in a launch before the passenger tender was alongside and, from his acquaintance with both captain and purser, was permitted to board her. To his surprise and disappointment, no such name as "Mme. Hilda Thorsberg" appeared on the passenger-list or on the purser's memoranda of certain passengers whose names were customarily withheld from it. But the captain had had his suspicions that one of his most attractive passengers was German or Swedish rather than French, and tried a little experiment which proved effective. Telling Manners to lean over the rail near a certain vivacious blonde who happened to be standing in a bay of the gangway, alone for the moment, he sauntered along until just behind her and then said, quietly:

"Has Madame Thorsberg forgotten her *companion du voyage* on the *Helig Olav*, some years ago? I am sure I can't be mistaken—though you have married since—and did not like to have you leave my ship without recalling that other voyage."

The woman gave a barely perceptible start—recognized the captain's voice—and turned slowly around with a smile to face him.

"Were you addressing me, Captain? You think we were former shipmates? I've crossed with you on *paquebots* of the *Compagnie Générale* before, but do not recall any other occasions. Case of mistaken identity, I fear."

"A thousand pardons, Madame! The resemblance is a very strong one, but I was mistaken, of course. Can you not arrange to book passage with me when you return?"

The woman hadn't noticed Manners, as he leaned over the rail, apparently absorbed in watching people on the tender alongside—yet he hadn't missed the slight start she gave before turning about to greet the captain, nor the momentary expression on her face. When he and the shipmaster met, a few moments later, he said:

"I'm quite convinced, the woman is Hilda Thorsberg—a secret agent—conspiring with others to pull off some dirty political *coup* against the United States! If she has sent or received a radio from Von Ebeling or Adolf Groenberg—head of the big chemical house—that would settle it."

Taking him at once up to the radio-room on the boat-deck, the captain told the young Frenchman in charge what Manners had said. After thinking for a moment, the radio-man said:

"Our rules are pretty strict, M'sieur le Capitaine, in regard to letting anyone see a passenger's messages, as you know—but I have an errand below for a few minutes. Wont you and your friend come in and make yourselves comfortable here, while I'm gone? Close the door and you'll not be disturbed."

It took the two but a few minutes to run through the messages on the incoming and outgoing file-hooks—finding among them one from Mme. Oudinet to Von Ebeling—a coded one from him to her—and one from Groenberg suggesting a hotel frequented by French and Swiss on the *Rive Gauche*. Making copies of all three, Manners returned the messages to the file-hooks as he had found them and asked the steward to fetch up a box of prime Havanas for the radio-man when he returned. Neither Madame Oudinet or the messages were referred to again in any way.

RUNNING up to Paris by the first *rapide*, he and Tremaine had little difficulty in decoding Von Ebeling's message—that sort of thing having been a detail of their work in the Army Intelligence departments. This was an hour or so after Tremaine's interview with the Senator—so that both were able to estimate, somewhat, the effect of publishing Gwynnell's story on Von Ebeling. When decoded, his message read:

Arrangements perfected here for Americans in Paris—may need your assistance—may be necessary to leave for Berlin any moment. Hold documents until further orders. Register Groenberg's hotel. Will advise later whether I can see you and where. If not, will advise who is to receive documents.

"Chances are," said Manners, "that Von Ebeling will sue the Senator for libel when that story is published in the morning;

but he'll do it through his attorneys and will probably get out of Paris at once to let this thing blow over. It will smash his plans for the other Americans as far as anything he might have contemplated over here—leaving the use of the documents Hilda Thorsberg has until they are on their way home at least. I fancy she has managed to rake up personal data concerning at least a dozen American statesmen which might prove a deuced effective weapon under certain conditions. Different men react to attempts to coercion in different ways. Most of those who have been in public life for a number of years get so used to such threats that they act like Gwynnell—who, though he thought he might be facing utter ruin, socially, didn't hesitate a second in telling those bounders where they could go when it was a question of his professional honor. On the other hand, a Congressman in his first term might be so sensitive to public opinion that anything which threatened his personal reputation would seem a mountain rather than the mole-hill it really is—and—oh, well! I fancy neither Von Ebeling nor this Hilda woman would bother to spend time and money accumulating such compromising data unless it was pretty heavily loaded! Our best chance in blocking their game is to get possession of those papers before that scoundrel Von Ebeling can give Hilda Thorsberg instructions for disposing of them—"

"Which means that I had best impersonate him and call upon her about tomorrow evening—eh? That'll run to a bit of risk, I'm thinking."

"Oh, yes! There were chaps in our brigade at Ypres who said that army service in that particular sector was not entirely safe. In this game, it's much a question as to which side outguesses the other. I'm of the opinion that, having sent Hilda that code-message and finding Gwynnell rather more difficult than they imagined, neither Von Ebeling nor Groenberg may go near her for a day or so lest they drag the woman into whatever complications there may be in the Senator's case. At least, if I were in their place, I fancy I'd be cautious to that extent. After the Senator's story is published tomorrow morning I'm quite sure they won't go near her, because they'll be under espionage from the French Government and are shrewd enough to know it. Suppose I

were able to locate Von Ebeling during the next hour, with the assistance of the Prefecture, and shadow him tonight—giving you some prearranged signal with a motor-horn if I see him going into her hotel, so that you can beat it on the jump? Eh?"

"And try calling on her *now*? Hmm. It's not much after ten. I was lucky enough to pick up a photograph of Von Ebeling today, in one of the fashionable galleries on the *Rue Rivoli*—could make up to impersonate him in half an hour, I fancy! Very good—let's go! I'm a firm believer in the bold, prompt game, myself."

JUST before eleven, as M^{me}. Oudinet was about to retire, the commissionaire called up from the bureau on the ground floor that a M^{rs}. Von Ebeling wished to know if she could receive him for a few moments concerning some of her legal affairs. With just enough hesitation to disarm suspicion upon the part of the hotel management, she consented—asking to have the gentleman shown up in ten minutes, when her maid would have gotten her into presentable clothes.

Now, though barely thirty, Tremaine had really a talent for secret-service work which had been tested and demonstrated in the army—one feature of which was, as Manners had put it, the ability to out-guess his opponents. After a minute comparison with the photograph and concentrated visualization of the man as they had seen him, Manners pronounced his friend's make-up extremely close—also his imitation of the Berliner's personalities. But Tremaine figured that the longer time he spent with Hilda Thorsberg in this momentous interview, the greater the chance of her discovering the imposture. So that what he intended saying and his instructions to her were planned to the smallest detail. Coming into the drawing-room of her suite in a hurried manner—with evident abstraction—he began talking before they were fairly seated on a divan in one corner—jerking out his words as if much preoccupied.

"Hilda—we shall have to change part of our campaign owing to the pig-headed obstinacy of one American Senator! We caught him cheating at cards in a private club, last night, before half a dozen respectable witnesses—enough to ruin him completely when the story gets out. I saw

him this afternoon—offered to hush the matter up if he'd agree to do a favor for one of the losers who was bent upon publishing the whole story. Knowing perfectly what he was up against, he coolly told us to go to hell! There's some hope of scaring him, yet—but one never knows what a fool like that will do next! Probabilities are that Groenberg and I will better leave Paris for awhile. In the circumstances, I think it dangerous to let him handle our campaign in Washington—he may be dragged into this poker story and accused of conspiracy. I'm leaving on a Fabre liner from Marseilles in forty-eight hours—taking with me Hermann Steiner, of Hamburg. You don't know him—but in this sort of game, he's even better than Groenberg—poses as the Graf von Rinteling. I'll take all the data and documents you have and turn them over to him before morning—just on the chance that the Prefecture may be watching me! Are they in a package which can be carried inside my waistcoat?"

The whole story was admirably conceived and delivered. It was convincing from its very brevity and the impression of unforeseen emergency. She never doubted his identity for a second—nor a word of what he said. The morning papers confirmed them in every particular. His insistence upon checking-up the data concerning every man she had been after would in itself have settled any doubts. She drew from a long pocket inside her petticoat an envelope of oiled silk in which were several typewritten pages of Japanese tissue—very thin, yet unusually strong. Stowing these in an inside pocket of his waistcoat, he embraced her hastily—mentioned another hotel to which she must transfer herself in the morning without leaving any address—and told her to re-

main there until she received word either from him or from a certain Junta in Charlottenburg. Then he hurried out. As the real Von Ebeling purposely kept away from the hotel for the next few days, he lost track of her entirely for several months—suspected her of tricking him—and to this moment, has no clue to the man who impersonated him so effectively.

AT the Maison Dyvnant, that evening—when Mr. Carter arrived in response to a telephoned request—Tremaine handed over the documents he had obtained, giving him and the Countess details of the whole plot. With the typewritten pages spread before them on the table, Carter and Her Ladyship looked up at each other in amazement.

"Upon my soul, gentlemen—this matter is dev'lish serious! Or rather, it *would* have been if you two hadn't butted in and smashed the whole scheme. I'll make a point of seeing each of these men—go back to Washington a week for that purpose—show him just what those scoundrels were holding over his head. Then we'll find some means of protecting them against whatever menace there may be in this mess. I don't quite grasp the reasons which induced you young men to mix in this at the start, or why you took the personal risk of seeing the matter through—but you have rendered the United States a valuable service. The Government can't and wont recognize it—yet I think that neither Canada nor Australia will lose by it in the long run. Aside from that, I want, personally, to express my appreciation of an exceedingly neat diplomatic *coup*. Gwynnell wont forget it—nor any of these other men. May I drink a glass to a couple of exceedingly promising young players in a very old game?"

"THE KEN-CARYLL CASE," a captivating novelette by Forbes Parkhill, will be a feature of the forthcoming December issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. And with it will appear many other specially attractive contributions by such writers as E. Phillips Oppenheim, Frederick Bechdolt, Clarence Herbert New, F. Morton Howard, Culpeper Zandt, George L. Knapp, Malcolm Mac Alpin and George Allan England.



The Rose of Gold

CHAPTER I

FOR a long while now there had been utter silence. It was as if the whole world were locked in a profound slumber, over which pallid stars in a purple firmament kept eternal vigil. It was like the genetic moment between the fifth and the sixth day of creation. All that God had made and pronounced good, even the air itself, seemed waiting in awed abeyance for the final, the paramount act of Deity: for the bringing forth of the creature, man, made in His own image and after His own likeness, to whom was to be given all dominion.

And then, as if in pursuance of the parallel, there was a sudden disturbance amongst the tall spikelike reeds under the willows by the side of the black, glassy waters of the narrow, rippleless stream, whose bed lay close to the very heart of China. The tops of the reeds waved for an instant to and fro as if fanned by a breath that left the leaves of the willows untouched. Then again all was motionless, still, as before. Twice was this seeming anomaly repeated. Twice in the same spot

the reeds fluttered and rested. To the watchers in stellar space it could but appear that the labor of bringing forth was not easy. The end, however, justified the delayed parturition. For, as the reeds rustled for the third time, they divided, and from the midst of them there emerged a new Adam indeed; or, to exchange an Israelitish figure for a pagan one, a new Apollo Belvedere.

The reeds rose to his waistline, but his torso, as he lifted high his arms, flexing steel muscles and inflating his lungs until his chest swelled barrel-like, was magnificent. Even in the dim starlight reflected by the water under the boughs of the bending willows this was apparent. Lacking sight of his face, one familiar with the characteristics of the various types of the Chinese people would have set him down as from the province of Hunan, the natives of which possess a finer physique and a more highly developed intelligence than are to be found anywhere else in the Flowery Republic.

But he was not of Hunan. He was not of China at all. His skin was not yellow, it was brown: a golden brown, dyed so by



A Complete Novelette
By CHARLES STOKES WAYNE

the sun. He was a white man, and he was lost—lost in the middle of this vast Oriental country, which, with its dependencies, occupies nearly one third of the continent of Asia. He was lost, moreover, without a stitch to his back or so much as a mace to bless himself with, and he was very hungry. He had eaten nothing in—the time was difficult to compute. It was his hunger that had awakened him.

Having stretched himself and taken that long breath, he stood for a little, listening. Not the faintest sound came to his attentive ears. Yet he had gone to sleep to the echoing rataplan of rifle-firing; a sleep of exhaustion following hours of seemingly endless swimming in that narrow stream or creek, from which he had drawn himself up the shallow bank with effort, to drop more dead than alive into the rest and shelter of the reeds.

HE had no means of measuring the intervening time. It was night when he left the water. It was still night. Dawn might be but minutes or it might be hours distant. He moved back through the reeds beyond the fringe of willows, and came into

the open. From there he scanned the heavens. Overhead the stars held their places, but there was nowhere any visible horizon. It was as though he were in the center of a great bowl.

The hunger which had roused him now impelled him to risk losing his sense of direction and with it the refuge of that water as cover for his nakedness. To safeguard this as far as possible he endeavored to fasten in his memory a certain constellation which seemed to overhang the trees beneath which he had rested. Then, with this behind him, he set off, at a right angle to the creek, across a furrowed field, the dew-moistened earth cool to his bare feet. The still air, though, was warm and humid, and it was not long before, weakened by his overexertion of the day and his lack of sustenance, he was sweating from every pore. From brow to ankle his skin was bathed in perspiration which from oozing drops gathered into trickling streams. At every step his hunger became more and more intolerable; so intolerable at length that he dropped to his knees and began digging with his hands in the soil. For all at once it had occurred to him that what was

planted here might be edible. Yams, perhaps, or turnips, or some native tuber.

FOR minutes he dug frantically, here and there, but without result. To all appearance the soil was fallow.

When he rose again, he began running. In a country so thickly populated it was not in reason to suppose that he had come upon a wilderness. The ploughed field spoke for itself of near-by habitation, and then, too, there had been that rifle shooting. A sort of mist veiled his perspective, aiding the dark, so that nothing was visible for more than forty or fifty yards ahead. Very suddenly, therefore, he found himself, without warning, on the edge of a thicket of bamboo. And at sight of it his heart leaped. At the moment it seemed to him that nothing could be more delicious than the tender young sprouts of this woody cane. But anticipation and realization were far different. In the dark, and in the eagerness of his quest, it was no easy matter to select, and the promised succulence was missing. Dismayed, but his appetite still demandful, he moved farther into the thicket, in the hope of finding sprouts younger and more tender. And it was while so engaged that he was suddenly arrested by a prolonged moaning sound.

To the best of his judgment it was the utterance of a fellow-being in distress, and at no great distance. The direction whence it came was not so readily decided, however. There was no wind from any quarter, so he was without that to guide him. But his ultimate conclusion was that, as he had heard it now for the first time, it must be somewhere in advance of him. Nor did it take any great perspicacity to connect it with the rifle-firing of earlier in the night.

For the moment, at least, his hunger was forgotten, and he pressed his way forward through the tangle of the thicket with all the haste possible. This, considering the darkness, was not only rather limited, but most trying. Again and again he came upon apparently impenetrable walls of bamboo, involving a detour to right or left, with the result that before very long he was all at sea, so to speak, as to his direction. The thicket, indeed, was a maze, and there was about an even chance of his emerging on any one of its four sides.

Now and then he paused to listen, hoping that a repetition of the sound might, by sounding clearer or less clear, tell him whether he was heading towards it or away

from it. But no repetition reached him. His progress, therefore, had to be continued at random, with obstacles, and not instinct, serving as his only guide.

For more than an hour, it seemed to him, he thus laboriously picked his way in no certain direction through what with every step appeared a more and more impenetrable tangle. Then, abruptly, he was conscious of a lightening of the gloom. The black had become a leaden gray, in which the stems of bamboo began slowly to define themselves like inky shadows. Thus assisted, his advance quickened, and by degrees the light grew. So that very shortly the edge of the thicket was discernible, and in another few minutes he stood once more in the open under the calm light of the stars.

There was as yet, though, no sign of dawn. The mist still veiled all but his immediate surroundings. Was he, or was he not, on the same side from which he entered? His gaze turned upward in search of that distinguishing constellation. It swept the sky in a circle, but without avail. Either he had forgotten, and so failed to recognize it, or it was hidden behind that hazy curtain that draped the horizon.

He took a dozen steps away from where he had been standing and realized then, for the first time, that he was no longer on ploughed ground. Where he had entered, that furrowed land had run close to the edge of the thicket. Here the soil was untilled. A few steps more and he was confronted by what at first struck him as the border of a kitchen garden with row on row of berry bushes. His mouth watered. In a minute he was amongst the rows. But again disappointment was his portion. He was in the tea country, and these were young tea plants from three to four feet in height.

Coming out from among them he turned to his left. Somewhere about here there must be a house and people. Somewhere, too, not very far away, some one needed aid. If he found the house first he would arouse the inmates, beg for some clothing, a bite to eat, and searchers to hunt with him the moaning sufferer. If, by chance, he should find the sufferer first, he, in all probability, could direct him to the nearest habitation.

HE was keeping now the bamboo thicket on his right, while the tea garden stretched away in row after row on his left.

The stillness was unbroken. Not so much as the drone of an insect nor the cry of a night-bird invaded this silence. The regular pad-pad of his bare feet as he walked was magnified in his own ears to a degree that seemed to echo in a sort of reverberant thunder against the night's dead quiet. So when, suddenly, he was shocked to a halt by sight of a shadowy figure stealing across this road, or way, that he was pursuing, it seemed to him as if the cessation must of itself arrest and attract the attention of this prowler.

Instinctively, he crouched low, and so bent gained the cover of the tea plants. The figure, but faintly silhouetted amid the night haze, had issued from the thicket only to be lost in the alleys of growing tea. For here the bushes were much higher: young trees, indeed, tall as himself and inches taller than the shape that he had seen.

His impulse, after the first panic of shame of discovery unclothed, was to cry out. He was in urgent need of succor. And yet, in view of those shots heard earlier and the distress of that moaning wail heard but so short a time ago, discretion might indeed, now, be the better part of valor. By making his way diagonally through the tea he could in all probability draw near enough to that other to glimpse him without himself being seen. This seeming the wiser alternative he put it into instant practice. The result was that, even before he expected it, he had come upon a narrow lane—the narrow lane, in fact, which was the third side of the triangle he had set out to compass, and into which he knew now that other solitary figure had entered.

There was, however, no sign of the person he quested. For some little distance each way he could see clearly enough, and the lane was unmistakably empty. He concluded, therefore, that the other must have turned off it before reaching this point; and this, he believed, argued that there was in all probability, if not the dwelling of the owner, at least the house of his overseer or some of his workmen. On this supposition he followed the lane back in the direction of the way he had just left. Nor was he, this time, disappointed.

In less than fifty yards the shadowy bulk of a low, squat building came into view on his left, setting back a bit from the lane. On nearer approach it proved to be one of those sun-dried-brick structures, roofed

with a mixture of lime and clay spread upon reed mats, so common in all parts of China. Its single door stood wide open and through it came a feeble flush of meager candlelight.

Once more the plight of his stark nudity deterred him from bold approach. He preferred, rather, under cover of the darkness and a fringe of the tea trees opposite, to survey as much of the interior as possible before making his presence known. It was well that he did. For he had barely thus hidden himself and gained a perspective when a moving figure came into view. A figure well defined in the candle-glow—the figure of a rather small, inimitably dainty, and strangely, yet ideally, lovely, young Chinawoman.

CHAPTER II

OWEN NAIRNE, son of the American porcelain magnate with potteries the world over, drew instinctively back a pace and colored under his two-day growth of beard. He realized at this moment that something intuitive—some subjective sense—had dictated from the first what had seemed like over-delicacy. Male nudity was, as he well knew, the last thing imaginable to shock a Chinese peasant. Yet to encounter a native woman at such an hour had never entered his conscious thought. Even now he wondered if he were not dreaming.

He rubbed his eyes with his soiled knuckles and looked again. She was now framed in the doorway. She was coming out, with what appeared to be a bottle in one hand, a fan in the other, and over one arm some strips of white muslin. In an instant she had vanished in the direction of the bamboo thicket, and the obviousness of her errand was so clear as to exclude mental debate. Unquestionably it was connected with that prolonged moaning sound* that he had heard while making his way through the cane growth.

Obvious enough too, it seemed to Nairne, was the fact that, as he had overheard no speech and no one accompanied her, the house was unoccupied, and the way, therefore, clear. Since necessity knows no law, it was now not merely a privilege but a duty for him to take clothing where he found it. And as he crossed to the open doorway his hopes soared to the height of finding food therein as well. What he was

least prepared for, though, was what he found. For he had no sooner crossed the threshold than he was halted by the sight of two corpses lying stark and staring on the mud floor to his left.

One was an old man, the other younger—his son perhaps—and both, as their poor cotton attire told, had been peasant farm-workers. Here, then, evidently was the scene of some of that shooting he had heard, and it was a fair deduction that the bodies had been dragged in from outside after the departure of the attacking force, and probably by the manifestly efficient as well as lovely young woman he had just seen. From the first he had associated that moan with the rifle-firing, and he was sure now that it was one or more of the so wounded that she was attending.

The one candle burned on a table within six feet of the bodies, and beside the candle were a bowl, half filled with rice, a large teapot, nearly empty, and two used cups. Unaffected by the gruesomeness of his surroundings Nairne helped himself avidly; and only when the bowl was clean to the last grain and the pot to the last drop, did he make further exploration. In a far corner was a rude sort of wardrobe, at sight of which his expectation vaulted, only to meet a fall. It contained nothing but a few cooking utensils of the most primitive character. Nowhere in the whole single room which made up that interior was there a shred of wearing apparel, save that on the slain yellow men, towards whom he turned now in sheer desperation.

The older man was the taller and heavier of the two, but he appeared considerably under Nairne's measurements, nevertheless. The emergency, however, was too great to quibble over. In some way those blue cotton things must be made to serve. And there was no time to be lost. In less than a minute the young American had stripped the dead man to the skin.

The jacket, or blouse, was blood-stained, and the stains were still damp. The victim had evidently either been running away or he was fired on from behind by an unseen enemy. For the wound was in his back, and Nairne was thus ignorant of the soiled character of the garment until he had it in his hands. Then, with an instinctive shudder, he dropped it over the recent wearer's middle, and proceeded to slip one leg after the other into the appropriated trousers. To his pleased surprise, they were scant

only in length. Slender-waisted and lean-flanked, despite his robust girth of chest, he found that he had underestimated the adaptability of the native nether-garment.

For just one additional moment, then, he delayed his departure. From the raised brick platform in the adjacent corner, which served as a bed, he drew off the coarse mat of reeds and spread it over the silent, impassive pair on the mud floor, before going out.

NOT until he had come to the end of the lane, crossed to the bamboo thicket, and plunged recklessly into it, did it occur to him that, considering the circumstances, the sounds of his approach must be laden with terror. What other conclusion, indeed, could that strangely fascinating little angel of mercy draw than that the enemy had returned and was beating the thicket in search of fugitives? And no sooner did the thought come to him than he halted. At the same moment something flashed directly ahead of him. A spark, as it were, which died as quickly as it was born. For a second he thought it was the flash of some sort of firearm. But when no report followed he knew that it must be an electric torch. It had been absurd for him to suppose that she could administer to anyone blindly in the Cimmerian darkness of those depths of bamboo.

Before he was conscious of his purpose he had called out:

"No danger! A friend! An American!"

He spoke in what is known to foreigners as the standard or mandarin dialect. And he was understood. For his words' echo had hardly died when the light flashed into view again and steadily held; and he moved forward now without further hesitation.

With the glare in his eyes he could not, at first, descry what was behind it; but he knew instinctively that it was the China-girl and her charge. The first thing that he saw was something white against the dark, and as he drew nearer he related it with the strips of muslin she had over her arm as she left the hut. But it was not a strip that held his eye; it was more like a white ball. And when he drew nearer, to find her crouched on her heels beside the recumbent figure of a man in a yellow-silk robe, he discovered that the shape was the man's head, on which she had performed an admirable bit of bandaging.

At Nairne's appearance the girl rose,

flashing the light for an instant on her own lovely face and her smile of greeting. Then, after an equally brief illumination of her prostrate companion, she returned the glare to the visitor, as she said, in pleasing English:

"How fortunate that you should have come! I hope I am not dreaming."

Her perfect composure, even more than the use of his native tongue with but the barest shade of foreign accent, so astonished the American that for a moment he himself questioned whether he was wide awake. And then, too, there was that efficiently done bandage. Yet in another second it had given him a hint of the solution.

"No," he replied, in English too, "I'm far from being a vision, as you may prove by letting me help you. I heard the shooting some little time ago, and I'm sorry I wasn't in time to give first aid."

The figure in the yellow robe stirred. Whereupon she dropped to her knees and bent solicitously over him, speaking softly in Chinese. Nairne caught the murmur of a low-voiced reply, but missed the words.

Almost immediately she had turned to Nairne once more with:

"You are so big. He would be nothing for you to carry."

"You're quite right," he answered.

Rested by his long sleep in the reeds, and fortified by the rice and tea he had partaken of, he felt equal to the transportation of two such helpless ones. For the wounded Chinaman was little taller than the girl and his bones were not half so well covered.

When he had gathered him gently and easily up into his arms, the bandaged head resting in the hollow of his shoulder, she said:

"I'll go ahead with the light. It's rather puzzling, this place, unless you know it. One can be lost in it for days. But there's a system in the way the clumps are planted that makes it quite easy when you know."

THUS led they were no time in gaining the open, and Nairne saw then that the sky before them was paling faintly with the first gray promise of dawn. They entered the lane between the endless rows of tea trees and came presently to the mud-hut, through the open door of which the light of the now dying candle came and went in an inconstant flicker. He was on the point of telling her that it was there he had first seen her, and of explaining

how, in his extremity, he had afterwards entered for food and at least some semblance of clothing; but at that moment there appeared, approaching, a half-dozen or more native men. Whether friends or enemies, at the instant, he could not tell, and his threatened revelation was swallowed up in hasty planning as to how dearly he might sell his life in defense of his charges.

The problem, though, was quickly solved by the ceremonious and deferential, if eager, exchange of greetings which ensued. From the first moment that the American had observed the yellow silk robe he knew, from his familiarity with China and its honorary distinctions, that he was in the presence of a prince of the blood royal, though he had taken his cue from the girl in refraining from letting his knowledge appear.

Now, though, there was no dissemblance. The rank of his disabled burden was obvious. Even the leader of the arriving group, who was as tall as Nairne and wore the purple robe of a mandarin of the first class and upon his cap the distinguishing ruby button, made three profound bows, while his followers scrupulously performed the *kêtow*, consisting of going three times on their hands and knees and at each prostration touching their foreheads three times to the earth.

This completed, four of the latter stepped forward and without any ceremony whatever relieved Nairne of his burden. Whereupon, the party about-faced and moved off. The wearer of the ruby button and one other, giving precedence to the yellow-robed, were about to follow, when the young woman, whom they were leaving to trail six paces behind, snatched impatiently at the sleeve of the purple robe.

"One moment, Hsi-Kyung," she said. "The foreign-born man has been to me of great service. It is just that he be rewarded. The wish of the High and Mighty One, I know, is that he be invited to your noble *yamun*."

The mandarin turned a little stiffly.

"What is your honorable name?" he asked.

"My not-in-the-least-worth-while name is Nairne," answered the young man, who had had some experience in the niceties of etiquette in the Orient.

"What is your exalted nativity?"

"I am of that modest land across-seas, the United States of America."

"It will give me unbounded happiness if you will be pleased to honor my insignificant hovel with your presence."

Nairne pleaded his unworthiness and accepted.

"Come, Mr. Nairne," whispered his lovely little intercessor, "you walk with me. I am dying of curiosity to know what happened to your clothes."

CHAPTER III

OWEN NAIRNE, who would be twenty-five on his next birthday, had spent at least a third of those years in China. But up until this eventful night he had never encountered a native woman who approached similarity with Miss Tuang. In her was embodied such a well-balanced admixture of East and West as to afford him a continual round of surprises. Her infinite composure, for example, on this occasion of direst peril, was purely Oriental. Nothing could have been more nearly perfect than the poise with which she greeted Nairne's appearance, and with which she conducted herself throughout the subsequent incidents. Yet, mingling with it, running through it as the wool through the warp of a fabric, was the freedom from convention which is so eminently of the Occident. What, for example, could have held more of contrast than that question touching his semi-nudity and the stilted formality of his exchange of compliment and depreciation with Hsi-Kyung still echoing in the lane of the tea trees?

There had been time then for only the most condensed of narratives, involving treachery on the part of boatmen engaged at Ichang to conduct him by the route of creeks and canals to Hankow. And time only for her to give him but the briefest hint of an attack upon the *yamun* by a mob of outlaws who might or might not be of the revolutionary army. So that it was not until the afternoon of the following day that they were made mutually acquainted with all that had occurred.

The mandarin had placed at Nairne's disposal a choice wardrobe of magnificent colorings and textures; and, seated now in a summerhouse in the garden of the official residence, with the girl beside him, he contributed an alluringly picturesque figure to the scene, while at the same time he broke into a thousand fragments a many-century-guarded convention of the Land of Flowers.

Each sat on a smooth stone, supported by a rustic stool of three legs, a teapoy between them; and both, with a pleased sense of well-being, were smoking leisurely and luxuriously a dainty, slender brand of Russian cigarettes. The exotic character of the scene, mixed though it was, was wonderfully picturesque. For the kiosk, with peaked roof of shining tiles, the color of green jade, was on a little eminence of rock, about which circled a bridged stream, sweet with floating beds of lotus and narcissus and shaded by fruit trees gloriously and fragrantly in bloom. And the man and woman therein, so colorfully garbed, were, each in their way, no less things of rare beauty. Nairne, bareheaded, his fair hair brushed sleekly back from brow to neck, his face and hands tanned by the sun to the copper tint of a red Indian, was a typical example of the refined yet lusty young American. His companion—natively named Tuang Kwei-hua—made, however, a not altogether characteristic picture of her race. And was all the more lovely for this lack. Not that the traditional traits of feature and figure were totally absent, but that they were softened to a point of idealization. Tempered, to begin with, with an admixture of the Manchu, there had evidently been in the course of many generations a gradual fusing of line and curve, until in this final product the supreme summit of grace and symmetry was attained.

Owen Nairne, gazing at her between half-closed lids as the smoke of his cigarette and hers mingled and rose between them, thought that he had never before seen anything so exquisite as her complexion. The color was to him like that of silver-alloyed gold leaf through which a light shone, and yet the texture was delicate as the velvet of rose petals. Were it not for the little straightly cut bang of shining jet that half hid the beauty of her low brow—the distinguishing sign of maidenhood—she might readily have been mistaken for an Occidental.

Once, in the course of her recital, he interrupted her to say:

"I've a better name for you than Kwei-hua. That means simply our oleander, and oleanders are poisonous, most of them. I'm going to call you Rose of Gold, if I may."

She smiled delightedly, showing her perfect little teeth, like pearls in a coral setting.

"I think it's beautiful," she answered. "I shall like you to call me Rose of Gold."

She gave him more tea, then, and went on with her story.

"You see," she continued, "I had been here at the *yamun* only little more than a day. I came from the north with my great-uncle, Tuang Wah-Sing, who is second cousin to the late emperor. He was on his way to Hongkong, and, in the unsettled state of the country, he thought best that I should have more of an escort than just my maid and her husband, on my journey back to the training school for nurses at Changsha. So we came with rather a large and conspicuous *entourage*. You know, with us, travel is a more leisurely matter than in Europe and your America. At Hankow we were met by Hsi-Kyung, an old friend of my great-uncle, with an invitation to visit him here on the outskirts of Shasi, in the province of Hupeh. We knew that the Southern rebels, who are for the most part outlaws, had been committing pillage and other outrages in Hunan, but we were assured that everything was peaceful hereabouts. Barely had we arrived here, however, when we learned that turbulence had broken out in the district. But the *yamun* was regarded as impregnable, and the news furnished only a rather pleasing, mild excitement. There was just one thing, though, that we didn't know, and of course hadn't taken into consideration, and that was, that many of the coolies engaged within the walls of the *yamun*, as well as without, were in league with the enemy.

"What might have happened but for the information given us by one who had been approached and, while pretending to enlist, still remained loyal, can only be surmised. He and his son—who was as faithful as the father—lived in that house near the edge of the tea plantation that we passed coming here."

Nairne, who, while marveling at the perfection of her English, and engrossed in the contemplation of her beauty, had missed nothing of the sense of her narration, broke in now with:

"And they were both killed, poor chaps."

"Yes. But how did you know?" she asked in evident surprise.

He told her, adding: "It was the trousers of the father that I appropriated in my necessity. For the beggars that did me up and threw me, more dead than alive, into a rice swamp, robbed me of my last stitch."

She was insistent then that he should tell her more, but beyond saying that he had taken to the creeks and canals, swimming part of the time under water to avoid further trouble with the natives, he refused to interrupt her story.

"Mine," he said, "is commonplace compared to yours, and will keep. I want to know how your great-uncle was wounded and how he came to be in the bamboo, and you with him." But that, really, was only a secondary desire. Before it came the delight of hearing her speak his own tongue with just the faintest and most inimitable shade of an accent.

"Lung Tu," she said, with a graceful gesture in the direction of the tea trees of the delicate, almost doll-like hand in which she held the inevitable fan, "gave us the hour of the planned attack. For some reason he was late in giving it, and there was little time for either precaution or preparation. That, and the fact that entrance to the compound was to be made through the north gate, were all the facts he knew. Hsi-Kyung was very calm and very confident. Everybody, he declared, should stay in the great house, behind locked doors and windows. The eunuchs would take care of the women's side, in which, of course, I was to stay, and he and my great-uncle and all their official families were to shelter themselves on the men's side. In spite of what Lung Tu had told him, he refused to believe that any of the house servants were disloyal. The outside coolies might be, but even they, he imagined, had merely dissembled like Lung Tu and his son. My great-uncle, however, with a different mind, kept his own counsel. He pretended to fall in with his host's plans, and then, covertly passing the word to me to be in readiness for his signal, made plans of his own. Well, the long and short of it was that, quite unknown to the mandarin, we together slipped quietly out of the *yamun* by the south gate, each wrapped in a gray alpaca dustcoat of American make, bought in Peking for motoring."

THERE was a fascinating twinkle in her dark eyes as she said this, and her lips curled so entrancingly in a half-smile that Nairne's infatuation nearly leaped its enforced boundaries.

"Fancy us," she went on, "stealing like dim shadows across the court-yard, then through the unguarded gate, and losing

ourselves the next minute in the dark of the rows upon rows of tea plants!"

"But what a risk!" Nairne exclaimed. "You might have walked straight into the enemy forces."

Again she smiled. "Oh, no," she rejoined. "I had no fear. Not the least. My great-uncle is a very great and good man, and he is very wise. At such times he is guided by Divinity."

He was about to observe that Divinity did not shield him from injury, nevertheless, but already she was meeting that objection.

"We poor mortals are rather more than half blind, you know," she was going on. "Even when we have divine guidance, as in this case, we are not permitted to see much beyond our noses. I am sure that had we remained at the *yamun* we should both have been killed, as were a number, you know. That Tuang Wah-Sing received a scratch—a glancing scalp wound that, after the first agony of pain, left him stunned and partially paralyzed—is to be explained by divine purpose. One of your Western poets—Cowper, I think—wrote 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.' And that covers it exactly. I shouldn't presume to interpret, but don't you see, for instance, that but for that wound and one of the moans wrung by the pain you would not be sitting here now."

The American grinned a bit self-consciously and waved a deprecating hand.

"I'd be sorry to think," he returned, "that your kinsman suffered that I might be succored. Why not leave it that he was directed to choose the lesser of two evils?"

But his Rose of Gold refused absolutely to accept such an interpretation. "There was no evil about it," she protested. "He chose by direction that which was good."

"For me," he said, laughing, and helped himself to another cigarette from the box which lay on the teapoy.

"Oh, not you alone. For me, too, for that matter. It was me they were especially after, you know."

Nairne looked up in surprise, the cigarette held poised halfway to his lips.

"You!" he murmured. "But why should they have been after you?"

"I learned it only a little while ago. I'm such a tiny creature, you see; and we arrived with such a suite; and my great uncle was so conspicuous in his imperial yellow robes, embroidered with two drag-

ons, that they actually imagined me to be Pu-Yi."

Nairne gasped.

"The little eleven-year-old dethroned emperor Hsuan Tung?"

"Exactly. It seems that all through the South a report has spread that the republic is to be overthrown and his majesty restored to his throne. So to put the plan beyond execution my little royal distant cousin must at all hazards be done away with.

A look of gravity replaced the incredulity of the handsome young American's countenance.

"You're sure of this?"

"Quite sure. Some of the leaders have been captured and subjected to the usual torture. They all told practically the same story."

A flicker—a sudden flash of snow white—against the deep green foliage and reflected in the mirror of the narrow winding stream that circled their retreat deflected Nairne's gaze from the animated face of his companion.

"Look!" he said, quietly. "You evidently have a visitor."

A giant masculine figure clad in a loose suit of palest pongee and wearing a *sola topi* of dazzling whiteness, suddenly emerging from cover of the shrubbery, had now started to cross the nearest bridge.

The girl half rose to get a better view, and, as she did so, the newcomer turned his face in her direction. Nairne saw then that it was half hidden by a blue-black mustache and beard.

"Oh!" she exclaimed with something less than indifference. "It's Lykoff. Boris Lykoff. Have you ever met him?"

CHAPTER IV

FACE and figure no less than name loudly pronounced the Muscovite, but there was some elusive, indefinable thing about the man which, to Owen Nairne, if not to others, whispered Teuton. He had heard of him many times and in many places since his first coming to China—for Lykoff, with his brick-tea factories at Hankow and Kiukiang, was very prominent in the foreign colony—but it had never until now been his lot to so much as see him. And his first impression of the much-talked-of prince of the tea trade was the reverse of favorable.

Nor was this, under the circumstances, surprising. For Nairne, as has been indicated, was so pleasantly occupied at the moment that interruption by no matter whom must have been difficult to tolerate. And in the case of Lykoff it was especially so, because of the man's obnoxious air of self-importance and general superiority. Directly he entered the summerhouse his domination of the occasion pervaded. Following a languid word of greeting by Miss Tuang, to which he responded with an exaggeratedly courtly bending forward from the waist, she had presented her companion. Nairne, who had already risen, was about to speak, about to offer his hand, when the Russian checked both advances by a most casual nod. At the same moment he stooped to draw close to the young woman one of the stone-seated stools, and having seated himself upon it and deposited his pith-helmet on the floor beside him, he addressed himself exclusively to her.

"My dear mademoiselle," he was saying, "I cannot say how distressed I was to learn of the affair of last night. And particularly of the report that some of my own coolies were engaged in it. I wish to assure you that already that rumor is under investigation, and if I find it has any basis whatever, the guilty will pay with their lives. I have just come from an interesting conference with your distinguished uncle and his host, the mandarin. I am overjoyed to find that Prince Tuang is really no worse for his unfortunate wound, and I am pleased to know that both he and Hsi-Kyung entertain my own theory that the attack was instigated and led by those outlaw workers in the potteries of King-te-chen. The whole affair was very brief, as I suppose you know. But do you know why?"

The beautiful exemplar of the women of Awakened China said that she supposed it was because the attacking party had not found the Boy Emperor.

"Oh, no," Lykoff returned. "They had hardly begun their quest when they were surprised. Spies had already carried warning to the nearest headquarters of the Army of the Republic, and a detachment had been dispatched. It was the arrival of this detachment that practically ended things before they were fairly begun. A number of the rebels were killed, more wounded, and still more taken prisoners. The rest are probably even yet in full flight towards the South."

Nairne, fretting under the visitor's usurpation of privileges so recently his own, and nursing a not unwarranted antipathy, had paid small heed to his recital. On the contrary, he had turned a left shoulder to him; and, while he inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly the smoke of his cigarette, bent his gaze on a group of gay-winged butterflies circling and recircling about one of the narcissus beds in the stream below him. The mention of the potteries of King-te-chen, however, had caught abruptly his attention, and he regretted that he had missed the connection. For King-te-chen was his objective. Listening then more closely, his ears were open to the proposition which shortly followed.

"PRINCE TUANG tells me that it is imperative for him to go on to Hong-kong at once. Alone—accompanied only by his suite, I mean to say—he will be safe enough. But I have warned him, mademoiselle, against attempting to take you with him. The whole South country between here and there is now in a ferment. This foolish story about His Imperial Majesty, Hsuan Tung, is widespread, and it includes the equally ridiculous particular that the little emperor is traveling disguised as a young girl. Moreover, even the name of Prince Tuang has been associated with the subterfuge. So you must see that your kinsman, instead of serving as a safeguard, is, on the other hand, likely to subject you to the gravest peril. I have suggested, therefore, that for the time being he place you under my protection."

Nairne turned in time to see Rose of Gold's smile of tolerance, as she said: "You are very good indeed, Monsieur Lykoff. But—" and paused. And then he saw, too, the irritated snap and sparkle of the so-called Muscovite's dark eyes and a sudden, just discernible, lifting of the black beard beneath his earlobes, due to a determined clenching of his teeth and consequent hardening of the jaw muscles.

"But!" he exclaimed, making an effort to smile too, yet failing to mask his exasperation. "But! There can be no buts."

"What did my great-uncle say?" she asked, the amused look still lingering.

"He saw its advisability. He was deterred only by the thought that it would be imposing on my kindness. I insisted it would be I who would be under obligation. I should regard it as a great honor."

My house would make four of the *yamun* yonder. It is as splendid in its way as the Summer Palace." The words seemed to gush forth in a torrent.

The great-niece of the prince became serious.

"You are really too good, monsieur," she said with conviction, dropping the end of her cigarette in a water-bowl. "I am deeply grateful. But I am not a coward. I have no fears. I go to Changsha because my duty is there. You do not know, perhaps, that I am a nurse of the Red Cross. There is much work to be done, just now, at the Yale Mission, and my services cannot be spared. Otherwise I should be but too delighted to accept your generous hospitality."

"But you cannot reach there," he insisted. "I am sure of that."

"I have only to wear my uniform," she returned, "and—"

But he interrupted her, almost roughly.

"Uniform! Pah! Those rebels respect nothing. I know what I am talking about. You will be captured, outraged, murdered. It is not a matter to be made light of. And if you stay on here at the *yamun* it will be the same. They will not fail a second time. If you will not see it, yourself, then I must make your imperial uncle see it."

To Nairne, whose intuition was as keenly acute as a woman's, Lykoff's insistence meant more than appeared. Beneath this surface anxiety for Rose of Gold's safety lay, unquestionably, he felt, a motive born of self-interest; though just what it was he failed at the moment accurately to define. It might be in some fashion political, for, though the imperialists were temporarily out of power, a general state of unrest existed, and there was no telling what might be the ultimate outcome. Moreover, the Tuangs, in spite of their Manchu lineage, were of liberal and progressive views and not unfriendly to the present Republican executive. On the other hand, he had noted what he could not but regard as subtle indications, even in the moments of the Russian's greatest impatience, of something more alarming. For the last few minutes Nairne's gaze had been continuously upon that bearded face, and, though the generosity of its hirsute growth veiled the lower part of it almost as effectively as does the yashmak that of Moslem women, there was never absent from the speaker's eyes a covert covetousness that was nothing if not sensual.

Following his threat to appeal a second time to Prince Tuang, Lykoff very shortly rose. From the first he had declined the proffer of either tea or cigarettes, but on rising he helped himself to a cigarette from his own case, rather too resplendently jeweled; and then, as an evident afterthought, held out the glittering thing, first to Miss Tuang with some ceremony, and afterwards, perfunctorily, to Nairne; both of whom declined. Whereupon, returning the case to his pocket, then, leisurely helping himself to a match from the teapoy and lighting his cigarette, he bowed low to the fair little Manchu lady, and, without turning again to the American, strode, with chin lifted and shoulders squared, out of the kiosk.

CHAPTER V

BEFORE leaving Ichang, Nairne had dispatched his luggage to Hankow by steamboat down the Yangtze. Barring accidents, it should be there by now; and his host had very kindly offered that morning to send two of his trusted servants to fetch it. By these Nairne had transmitted on his own account a message to be telegraphed to Miss Balcombe, daughter of the British consul at Ichang, announcing his safe arrival, and adding the somewhat cryptic three words, "Isle of View," which he was quite sure Phyllis would be clever enough to read phonetically.

He had gone to Ichang for a week and had prolonged his stay for a month and more. As he phrased it to Rose of Gold, in the narration which followed Boris Lykoff's departure, "it was the golf" which kept him. "There's a jolly club there, and quite a British colony. All fine chaps," he declared. Yet for a reason not wholly inscrutable he said nothing of the women collectively, and less than nothing of Phyllis Balcombe, who was a strapping athletic girl with the bluest of blue eyes, cheeks the tint of a blush rose, and veritable masses of tawny gold hair.

Having overstayed his time, he explained, he balked at the idea of a four-hundred-mile journey by river, when by canals and creeks, the distance dwindled to a fourth of that by the winding Yangtze. In addition it promised some little adventure, though he had hardly foreseen its possibilities in this respect. The first thirty-odd miles were comfortably and expedi-

tiously covered in a very smart and swift motor launch, put at his service by the obliging British consul, who had provided him also with a letter to the good fathers at the French mission here located. A grave yet nevertheless kindly hospitality was extended to him by the good *missionaires* who arranged with native boatmen, guaranteed trustworthy, for the next stage of his journey. This too was accomplished without, apparently, any untoward incident. But after due consideration Nairne had now come to believe that it was these trusted ones who had intentionally diverted him from the true line of travel. Certainly it was they who had given him the explicit directions which led him into the hornet's nest that nearly cost him his life after taking him miles out of his way. The long and short of his story was that he was maliciously delivered into the hands of a community inimical to all aliens, and whose chief delight is to torture the "foreign devil" who is unfortunate enough to fall into their clutches. He had expected soon after this last change to enter the narrow Han River and so reach Hankow from the northwest, whereas, at some point he must have been turned back on his course. Otherwise it would not have been possible for him to have turned up as he did but a few miles back from the Yangtze and about equidistant from Shasi and Kingchow.

"The sampan," he explained, "in which I began this last stage of my voyage was of fair size and manned by four oarsmen, with a fat bandit with one eye at the helm. But before we'd gone more than two or three miles something happened. I haven't the least idea what. But the whole lot of them began to jabber excitedly in a patois I didn't know. Then, rounding a turn in the narrow creek, we came upon the border of a town, and before I quite realized what was up, the sampan was beached and I was made to understand that they could go no farther. I believe now that in some way word had been sent ahead and the whole plot arranged. Anyhow I was transferred to a long, narrow-beamed affair with a crew of one who rowed with his feet and steered with a scull held under his arm. There was but a single broad-bladed oar for propulsion, and it was rigged in a way that he could pedal it from the stern. For my part I was compelled to lie down with my back to him and my feet in the bow, as otherwise I would obstruct his view. In this way I was prevented, of course, from seeing any-

thing except a narrow bit of the sky through a slit in the shabby brown awning. I'm not suspicious by disposition and when I found that we were making much better speed than in the sampan I was so completely content that I closed my eyes and in less than no time was dozing.

"How long I dozed or how far I traveled in that fashion I'll never know. I was roused by a clod of soft mushy earth striking me full in the face and weighting my eyelids so that they couldn't lift. Naturally my hands went up automatically to tear it away, only to be caught in a noose of bamboo-fiber rope, instantly pulled taut. In such moments one's instincts are peculiarly alert, and I sensed that the craft was broadside against the bank of the stream. The next moment I was dragged kicking over the boat's side. Up to this time I had heard nothing. But suddenly a veritable Babel of voices burst upon me, excited, abusive, denunciatory and menacing. Then, as I was being drawn by my wrists up the slimy slope, spitting mud from my mouth and striking out first with one foot and then with the other in the hope of reaching some vincible spot in the bunch that swarmed around me, a crashing blow descended on my crown and I was out. To all intents and purposes I was as dead as I ever shall be."

AND all the while snugly against the American's right hip had rested an automatic of forty-five caliber with magazine intact, yet useless because of the restrained hands drawn high above his head. He had come back to consciousness slowly, through what seemed a maze of underground passages, through which he crawled with infinite pain and labor, to find himself in a soggy rice swamp, bereft of all clothing and every vestige of impedimenta. Night had fallen and he had no idea of general geographical location or, save for the swamp, of his immediate surroundings. Impelled more by a crying thirst and a burning fever, which the damp earth appeared inadequate to allay, than by any guidance of judgment, he half rolled, half crawled to the near-by bank, and dropped over its brim into the slow-moving, yet refreshingly cooler tide of the creek.

He was still stupefied to some extent. But his subjective mind assumed control. Instinctively he swam with the tide, a leisurely, regular stroke, requiring no more exertion than that of keeping him in mid-

stream. After a little, when the creek grew wider, he nursed his strength further by turning on his back and floating. Twice he had left the water altogether and sat for a time under willows that fringed its banks. Somehow he felt that the night was but an hour or two old. He had noted that a young crescent moon was slipping lower and lower towards the western horizon, and he had a hazy recollection of seeing it about in the same place at ten o'clock the night before. Once he came unexpectedly upon some fishermen, and narrowly escaped entanglement in their nets when he suddenly dived and was swimming under water. At another point he was warned of the presence of a little community of creek dwellers, living on boats, by the loud slam-banging of gongs and crashing of cymbals, telling him of some local festivity. Here, once again, he made to pass beneath the surface of the creek, but came up too soon and in the glare of colored fire was detected. Instantly there was a great outcry. Small boats gave chase, as did also runners along the banks, and it seemed to him for a time that he was once more to fall into the hands of these haters of the "foreign devil." He swam deep, with emptied lungs, until he felt that his chest must collapse under the torturing pressure and the veins in his throat and temples burst open and free the pent-up unoxygenated blood. In this way he outlasted the chase, though only after twice rising, each time luckily in the lee of one of the houseboats and hidden by its shadow.

Later he passed other of these villages of boat people, but no further celebration. In each instance the inhabitants were obviously deep in slumber, for there was no light to be seen or sound to be heard. For hours Nairne swam thus and rested by turns, his effort being, if possible, to reach a point beyond the boundaries of this unfriendly native element, before daybreak. But, weakened by his experience of the preceding day and his enforced fast, his endurance had its limitation. And when, finally, that echo of rifle-firing came to his ears and he found himself unable to locate its direction, he had yielded to his bodily urge for rest and accepted the shelter offered by reeds beneath the willows.

ROSE OF GOLD listened to Nairne's story with the rapt attention that never interrupts—than which there is no greater

compliment. It was, moreover, an understanding and appreciative attention, untiring and never listless—the attention that inspires the teller and draws from him his best. Nairne, in turn, had been equally interested in watching the face of his hearer. The Chinese, we have been taught from the days of Marco Polo, more successfully mask their emotions than any other nation on earth. Inscrutability has become a synonym for their expression—or lack of it. And no one knew this better, both by experience and hearsay, than Owen Nairne. Yet for fifteen minutes and more, while he spoke, there had sat before him, her eyes on his, an astonishingly complete refutation of that old and seemingly well-founded theory.

To every shade of color in the narration her eyes—her whole countenance, in fact—had instantly responded. She had set out joyously with him in the consul's motor launch from Ichang; she had delighted with him over the hospitality and goodness of the French missionaries; she had shown perplexity and apprehension over the change from the four-oared sampan of the fat one-eyed steersman to the smaller craft propelled by foot power; and her distress was palpable as he told of his rude awakening and his treatment at the hands of the barbarians which followed. Nor were her features in any degree less expressive as one after another the later incidents were presented to her.

But, while this surprised and gratified him, it was all the more pleasing and significant because it was in such complete contrast with what he had observed such a little while before. From the moment his interest had been elicited in Lykoff's talk he had watched the girl with more attention than he had given to the speaker, and he had observed then that it was utterly impossible to gather anything from her visage, unless it be utter indifference. Her eyes were impenetrable, her whole face as emotionless as though it were fashioned in wax or carved out of marble.

Following Nairne's story she supplemented her own, with certain details. She told him, for instance, that after the random shot which injured her protector she had remained beside him for a considerable time, hardly moving, lest even the faintest rustle in the still night might direct the enemy. Eventually she had concluded that that one wavering moan must have been taken by the marauders as the final prola-

tion of the death agony, as she was, herself, inclined in the beginning to fear it was. It was then that she had, for the first time, snapped on the electrical flashlight which Prince Tuang, with wise precaution, had taken with him on leaving the *yamun*. Reassurance on this point, though, had been gained by a stealthy finding of the prostrate one's pulse, on which she kept her fingers during all that seemingly interminable waiting. The subsequent illumination revealed the scalp wound, which was bleeding profusely, and it was in the hope of getting the help of old Lung Tu that she went to the little house in the tea plantation, only to come upon the lifeless bodies of him and his son. She had been fortunate enough, though, to find there some rough, unbleached cotton stuff, which she tore into strips for a bandage.

Nairne spoke of the bottle, but it appeared that he had mistaken the flashlight for this.

"It is too bad," she said at length, "that you should have been detained by all this, when you were in such haste."

"I've been more than repaid for the detention," he replied, in a tone and with a glance that were pregnant with meaning. "The fellow I am to meet in Hankow has instructions to wait until I come. As he has already waited for over a fortnight, a day or so longer wont matter." He paused a moment and added: "May I trust you with a secret, Rose of Gold?"

She smiled as he answered: "I'm a woman, you know."

"Which means I'd better not? Very well then. I'll give you a riddle instead:

"That man in Hankow

Has a secret, I vow:

A secret some hundred years old.

It has nothing to do

In the slightest with you;

Yet the answer is—What?—Rose of Gold."

The music of her laugh was suddenly silenced by the appearance in the summer-house of a slender, stately young Chinese gentleman in sapphire satin, ornamented in gold and black. He had entered silently from behind them and was as startling as a pistol shot at a wedding, until identified as a member of Prince Tuang's suite who brought a message from His Imperial Highness. Tuang Kwei-hua's presence was required at once by her distinguished great-uncle, at the *yamun*. The messenger

was most courteous and profoundly apologetic. Rose of Gold, too, apologized to the American. It was most annoying. But she would keep his riddle in mind and do her best to have an answer for him by evening.

But when evening came there was no answer, because there was no Rose of Gold. Etiquette forbade any such thing as a point blank question on Nairne's part and no one volunteered any information. When he ventured so far as to express a hope to his host that Miss Tuang was not indisposed, the response was a very simple denial. Beyond that he learned nothing whatever.

CHAPTER VI

WITHIN the billowy greenery of the British concession at Hankow, high above the turbulent Yangtze, is a public tea garden patronized by the rich natives as well as by American and European residents and visitors. Here, at a small table under an arbor fragrant with the perfume of moonflower, sat on the succeeding evening Owen Nairne; no less picturesque in his well-cut, snowy drill than in his borrowed Oriental plumage of the preceding afternoon. Facing him across the narrow board, on which still rested the evidences of a dinner just finished, was a small, elderly and somewhat wizened man who, despite his thin gray mustache and imperial and his Western raiment, bore the unmistakable markings of Celestial origin. He was giving his leisurely attention by turns to a long thin cigar and the oily-green contents of a slender liqueur-glass. His expression was one of dreamful content. For some minutes there had been an unbroken silence between the two men, during which Nairne's cigarette, held lightly between the first and second fingers of his right hand, had burned down to its last inch before warning him to dispose of it, and thus jerking him back to a consciousness of his surroundings.

All in vain had been his efforts throughout the dinner to concentrate his attention upon the matter which had been waiting now for the best part of a month for discussion and settlement. Again and again the edges of it had been skirted, once or perhaps twice there had been a brief invasion of its outer borders. But always the listless pursuit was diverted by a recurrence

of that more insistent topic, barely twenty-four hours old, which held so jealously the citadel of his heart as to repel each threatened invasion.

Young—which was a derivation of Yeng—taking advantage of the cigarette-provoked return of his young friend to present realities, observed placidly:

"The first question is whether Yat Sing is still living."

But Nairne's only response was to stare blankly for a moment. All he had caught were the last three words, and their connotation in his mind was not Yat Sing but Tuang Kwei-hua. Up until now he had studiously avoided all reference to the experience which so distractingly occupied his mind. It had seemed to him that Young was hardly the man with whom to share so romantic a confidence. But that chance utterance for some reason or other snapped the bonds of his reluctance. In fact he reached a point where reticence was no longer possible. He must talk to some one, and old Young was the only person available.

"He was an old man ten years ago," the Americanized Chinaman added. This gave Nairne the key he had missed, so he said:

"If you don't mind, suppose we drop Yat Sing for a bit. I find I'm not quite tuned to the business key tonight. I may be all kinds of a fool, my friend, but, as you've probably observed already, there's something on my mind that smothers everything else."

HIS elderly guest drained the slender liqueur-glass of its final drop and smacked his thin lips.

"I've noticed it," he confessed impassively.

"And guessed the reason, too, perhaps. Or part of it."

"You have committed some folly, I suppose. You suggested that yourself. But here in China we have a proverb, 'A wise man will not reprove a fool.' In that respect I am wise."

"I have fallen in love," confessed Nairne, leaning forward and resting his forearms on the little table.

"At Ichang, I assume, with some English blonde, big as the Milo Venus."

But the American shook his head a little sadly. "I thought that, myself, until yesterday. But I was mistaken. No, the English blonde was only a temporary in-

fatuation. Body, heart and soul I am the possession of a tiny Manchu princess."

Old Young smiled, but not in ridicule. It was a smile of appreciation and sympathy. "The Manchu princess is fortunate in such case," he said. "I hope the possession is mutual. A happy exchange. She yours as you are hers."

"Ah," returned Nairne, a sad note in the tone, "if that were so—if I could be sure! But she has vanished, taking all but my body with her, and not a word of love has passed between us."

"Vanished!" repeated his friend with as much quickened interest in the utterance as his nativity permitted.

"That," said the young man despairfully, "is the devil of it."

The Chinaman chose this moment to light a fresh cigar from the glowing cinder of his depleted one, and Nairne waited in silence. When he had the end well alight Young suggested:

"Wouldn't it be well for you to tell me the story? I know my people better than you. I may be able to find a solution."

No second invitation was required to evoke in detail the entire experience, and no raconteur ever had a more attentive and concordant listener. Not once was he interrupted. Young smoked with leisurely incessancy, nodding now and then to signify understanding, and quickening at times his inhalations over the more vital and dramatic stages of the narration. One occasion of this sort was near the end of the recital when Nairne said:

"Before leaving the *yamun* this morning I asked to be permitted to see Prince Tuang Wah-Sing and bid him farewell. I made the request of the mandarin, Hsi-Kyung, himself. He answered that he was desolated—running over, in fact, with sorrow and gloom—to refuse to so honored a guest such a trifling boon, but that His Highness was sleeping and could not, even for such a delightful and praiseworthy object, be disturbed. You see I had hoped, possibly, to gather from him some news of his great-niece. In fact, seeing that on the night of the fracas I had done him some little service, I fancied that, in the way of return, he would be glad to set my mind at rest."

WITH all the facts before him Young laid down his cigar and bent a little forward. A brown moth which had been fluttering about the shaded electric globe

overhead dived downward for an instant, grazed his furrowed cheek and returned aloft.

"Owen," he began, for he had been in the elder Nairne's employ, as confidential man, from the days of Owen's infancy, "I hope I am wrong, but I imagine that you and I have been wasting precious time. It might have been better had you told your tale before dinner than after. However, call your boy, settle the bill, and let us be off."

For three seconds following Young's final word, Nairne sat aghast. The speech was the very last thing that he had expected. He had sought ease, reassurance, comfort; and here was only fresh and augmented alarm. At the worst he had suspected nothing more terrible than that Rose of Gold and her great-uncle had been secreted somewhere against a possible further effort of the misinformed outlaws to kidnap her, believing her to be the young emperor.

"But why?" he asked, his surprise manifest. "What is there for us to do?"

For answer Young reached for the small pad-headed stick on a stand at his left and with it beat three strokes on the gong to which it was the complement. When the boy appeared he would have paid the account as well, had not Nairne, rising, come between them.

The arbor where they had dined was at the opposite end of the garden from the gate which served as both entrance and exit, and the path between was the reverse of direct. It wound in a series of half-circles between flowery borders and a multiplicity of other arbors of various sizes. In the center of all was a pavilion-like pagoda in which an orchestra, by courtesy Swiss, but actually German, valiantly murdered the works of French and Italian composers. Most of the arbors were occupied by diners, and patrons of all nations, singly, in couples and in groups, promenaded the all-too-narrow avenues, strung at intervals with Chinese lanterns.

Young, wonderfully active and alert for his years, led Nairne by two or three steps, making way at a pace which, considering the throng, was a marvel. When within a hundred yards of the exit, however, an obstacle was encountered, forcing them both to step aside; crowding them, indeed, upon one of the flower-borders.

It was a trio—three fowls, one cock and two hens of the same breed, to use the

poultry figure, and in fine feather. Nothing more showily sumptuous than the feminine two-thirds was probably ever seen in central China. Young pullets, both of them, of entrancing line and sweeping curve, which their rich plumage served more to disclose than to conceal. Chanticleer, strutting proudly between them, a guiding wing extended to each, and appearing all sable but for his snowy breast, was a veritable giant of birds.

Old Young gripped with attracting purpose his young friend's arm above the elbow as he whispered:

"Look, see! You recognize him?"

But already Nairne had taken in the group at a single glance. Boris Lykoff was too exceptional a figure once seen ever to be mistaken. And as for the women, their type was far too flagrantly obvious not to be recognized.

Once outside the gates Young commanded a double jinrikisha, and, with Nairne still in the dark as to destination and purpose, they sped away in the direction of the native city.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN, on that previous afternoon, Rose of Gold had gone smilingly away with the young noble in sapphire satin, promising Nairne an answer to his riddle, if she could solve it, by evening, it had been to meet, not her great-uncle, but Hsi-Kyung, who received her in his inner sanctum wherein most of his official business as a mandarin was conducted. He was seated on a small square raised dais, in an elaborately carved square chair of teakwood, and gorgeous in his robes of office.

Until now informality, evidently in recognition of Miss Tuang's caste, coupled with her adoption of the radicalism of Young China, had marked their association, and this sudden reversion to ceremony struck in her at once, not merely a note of surprise, but one of alarm. Nor was there anything in the mandarin's immobile countenance, or the words with which he addressed her, calculated to allay it.

"He who could see only three days into futurity might enrich himself forever," began Hsi-Kyung, quoting from one of his country's philosophers. "So, too, as Confucius tells us: 'If a man take no thought

about what is distant, he will find sorrow near at hand."

But it was the application of this borrowed wisdom that caught, as it were, Tuang Kwei-hua's heart in its hands and painfully compressed it, though her face gave no sign.

"Seeing three days into futurity or taking thought for what is distant would have spared your noble great-uncle from pain and prolonged his years. In the fastness of my humble *yamun* he would have been safe. But he chose to forsake my poor home for the protection of the devil-haunted bamboo, and sorrow is near at hand."

IN spite of her, the girl, with the ache in her breast, drew a sharp breath. It was but three hours since she saw her imperial kinsman, and he had seemed then very little the worse for his scalp wound.

"Prince Tuang, it tortures me to say, began sinking an hour ago. It is feared that there is some internal hemorrhage. He is now unconscious and—"

But this was too much. She could restrain herself no longer. Etiquette, under such circumstances, was less than a scrap of paper. She interrupted with:

"Why was I not told at once? Why keep me here now? I must see him."

Hsi-Kyung signalled a negative. "He cannot be seen," he said. "Dr. Kwanyin has so instructed."

"Dr. Kwanyin!" she repeated contemptuously. "What does he know? I am a nurse, trained by American nurses under American doctors, who are the best in the world. I would not give a *cash* for your Dr. Kwanyin, who, if not a village witch doctor, is certainly of the old school, and prescribes dried rats and lizards, or clotted dragon's blood. If we only had not left Dr. Carey behind in Hankow!"

"Dr. Kwanyin is very wise," the mandarin insisted. "He is doing everything that your American doctor could do, and more."

"I'll judge as to that after I have talked with him," she yielded. "Send for him, please."

"Impossible," was the reply. "He cannot leave his patient. He has said so. He is counting his breaths, measuring his heartbeats, noting the advance or recession of his bodily heat."

Tuang Kwei-hua rose from the stool on which she had been sitting. "That is non-

sense," she said, throwing the final shred of decorum to the winds. "Where is Ping Chang? I must talk to him. When he came to me in the garden just now he said it was my great-uncle who wished to talk with me."

Hsi-Kyung nodded. "I asked him to say so. I did not wish to alarm you. Nor was it necessary that he should know."

"But it is very necessary that he should know. Also that Ta Su and Mung Chi should know. They are of his suite: his confidential adherents and advisers."

"They have now been informed and are in conference."

"I must see them."

Something suggestive of a smile played about the thin lips of the mandarin, hitherto so consistently immobile.

"They have directed that they are under no circumstances to be interrupted."

"But they must communicate with Dr. Carey at once. Is there a telephone in the *yamun*?"

"The nearest telephone is at King-chau. But the rebels have cut the wires, as also those of the telegraph."

There was a moment of silence. Then the girl said:

"Very well, then. I will go to Hankow myself and bring Dr. Carey back."

"That is bravely spoken," commented Hsi-Kyung. "But I cannot permit you, even if I could spare you the necessary attendants. I feel that, in view of Prince Tuang's unfortunate incapacity, I am responsible for your safety, Tuang Kwei-hua. It pains me to deny your wish, but my judgment forbids granting it."

Once again, now, as in her conversation with the Russian, she asserted that her uniform of the Red Cross would afford every protection. But, if the mandarin preferred, she would take with her her maid, Shang An, and the young noble Ping Chang.

"The province is in too disturbed a state," he protested. "To attempt it would be to put your pretty head into the dragon's mouth."

ROSE OF GOLD, as Nairne called her, was now in despair. Or rather, she was on the verge of it and bending over. For all at once there had come to her a faint hope that her new American friend might be able to aid her in this great emergency. Determined to return to him at once, she made the required obeisance

and withdrew from the mandarin's holy of holies.

Giving heed to nothing save her one disturbing problem, she passed through one flagged court after another, and had just entered the west pavilion, which gave upon the garden, when a tall, broad and dominant figure in loose, pale pongee, and crowned with a spotless sun helmet, interposed its back to her egress.

Her step, light as it was, had already echoed to not unexpectant ears, and Boris Lykoff's turning synchronized with her observation.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. And then with an affectation of solicitude: "I see you have learned. It is too bad. I offer you all my sympathy."

THE velvety dark and long-lashed eyes of the little Manchu aristocrat, shining through a mist of tears, held in their depths a fervency of appeal. Such a little while ago she had scorned the proffered assistance of this great bear of a Muscovite, and now, in the moment of her need, here he was waiting like, it seemed to her, a veritable gift of providence to succor her in the greatest extremity she had ever experienced.

"Oh, Monsieur Lykoff!" she cried, her emotion breaking down the very last remnant of her studied repose and reticence. "You can and will help me, I know."

"You have but to command me," he answered. "On my return from my little talk with you in the garden I was as shocked, as you, yourself, must have been, to learn of the Prince's sudden relapse. But half an hour before he was apparently as well as I. His wound seemed nothing at all. It is very perplexing. I have been wondering if— But no. I must not say anything like that. I have no right to accuse even in thought."

"You mean?" she questioned, her eyes eager.

"Nothing. Hush!" with lowered voice. "I cannot speak here."

After a glance over her shoulder she laid a lightly persuasive hand on his pongee sleeve.

"Listen, monsieur," she whispered. "The minutes are flying and every one may be priceless. I want you to get me to Hankow as speedily as possible. There is an American physician there, who came from Peking with us and was to rejoin us when we continued our journey. If he can be got

here speedily he will save Prince Tuang's life. I know he will. How soon can you get me to him?"

Lykoff considered. His fingers moved—those of the left hand, on the arm of which her tiny hand still rested. He was calculating, the thumb touching one finger after another in turn.

"Before dawn," he answered presently.

She was disappointed. "But why so long?" she asked. "We came here in far less time."

"Very true," he agreed, smiling. "By the back way. The cut-off. By canal and creek. But it is no longer safe by that route. All through there there has been an uprising of the people. Alone I would go, yes. But I would not risk taking you that way. In the confidence of persuading you and Prince Tuang to share my home for a time, I prepared for the river journey. My steam yacht is anchored in the Yangtze, off the bund at Shasi, this moment, with steam up. It is a palace and very speedy. That way you will be perfectly safe and perfectly sure. Before this time tomorrow you can be back here with your American wonder-worker."

TO Rose of Gold it seemed like an eternity. But she had no other choice. Nairne, she knew, was handicapped. He was without any clothes, save those he had borrowed, and probably without money.

"Very well," she agreed, "I will be ready in five minutes—my maid and I."

She was turning away, but Boris Lykoff detained her.

"If you do not come now, as you are, alone, you will not come at all," he said impressively, in a low tone. "Hsi-Kyung will not permit it. I know." And that "I know" was filled with a significance that she could not mistake. So that his added: "More than that, your very absence may be the best means of saving your great-uncle's life," was merely confirmatory.

The grand-niece of the second cousin to a deceased emperor did not hesitate. It is the Chinese custom to leave the entrances to its courtyards unlocked and unguarded, since any effort to exclude strangers would be taken to mean that the owner has something to conceal. So wanderers come and go at will.

And so Tuang Kwei-hua, the beautiful, and Boris Lykoff, prince of the tea trade of China, passed from the grounds of the *yamen* unobserved.

CHAPTER VII

IN Hankow's Street of a Thousand Blessings, which is for the most part given over to tailors and dealers in ready-to-wear apparel, is the shop of Wong Chee, who will fashion for you, at the briefest possible notice, a suit of clothes from grass-cloth, or ramie-fiber cloth, or from silk, satin, or crêpe, with embroidery or without, according to your taste or your desire. On the same spot his father before him had conducted the business for forty-odd years, and his grandfather for even a longer period prior to that. Wong Chee, however, like all Chinese tradesmen, has his home elsewhere; for it is practically forbidden by precedent for a shopkeeper to house the female members of his family under the same roof with his business. All day long Wong Chee's habit is to sit within the open front of his establishment, patiently awaiting the pleasure of regular customers or of those new ones which fortune may be so good as to send him from the interminable throng of passers-by. The hour for extinguishing the lanterns, which at nightfall are lighted above the shop-fronts, and the gaily decorated lamps of glass or horn which depend from the eaves, and for putting up the shutters and leaving the stock in charge of assistants and apprentices, is about as mutable as the wind.

It was this mutability—the uncertainty whether or not Wong Chee might have deserted the turmoil of toil for the peace of domesticity—that so exercised Nairne's friend, Young. He had been a patron of Wong Chee's shop for many years. He knew him in his youth, before ever he went to America; and he had renewed the acquaintance soon after his return to China. But at no time had he ever learned the location of the tailor's residence, and he questioned his ability to ascertain it, should the establishment on the Street of a Thousand Blessings be closed.

On entering the native city the speed of the rickshaw had been very materially lessened. Within the British concession the roads were wide, in good order, and uncrowded. But, no sooner had they passed the gates of the walled city of a million inhabitants, than the congestion of the narrow, winding alley-like streets checked their progress to what was little better than a snail's crawl.

Young had revealed but the sheerest hint of his object to his companion, but it had

been enough to magnify his alarm. There had been stories, he said, about this Boris Lykoff. From all he had heard, the Russian appeared to be a veritable despot in the south of Hupeh and the north of Hunan. The mandarins were so subjugated by him and the power he exercised so flagrantly among the people, that he had only to nod to be obeyed. In the present instance he might not be in any way involved, but then again he might. Young admitted that he was not, himself, a capable judge. But there was a friend of his here, in the native city, if they could only find him, who was a bitter enemy of the Muscovite, and who would be able to dissect the matter in so far, at least, as to whether Hsi-Kyung was one of those who, in Lykoff's presence, dared not call his soul his own. Then, rather extraneously, he had added that this friend, Wong Chee, had once told him that Lykoff, for all his strength and despite his long residence in China, had one overpowering, desolating weakness—a mortal fear of lepers and leprosy.

Having conveyed this much, Young relapsed into an unshakable taciturnity. A perfect peace seemed to enfold him, and with clasped hands he sat as far back in the rickshaw as its space permitted, his eyes closed and his breathing so light and shallow that the exhalations from his nostrils would not have disturbed the lightest fleck of down.

NAIRNE'S impatience waxed by reason of very contrast. This calm acceptance of the inevitable fretted him to torture. Relentlessly he urged the coolies to quicken their pace. He swore at them, in their own dialect, their own oaths. With his walking-stick he prodded again and again their bare, muscular backs. He threatened, and he cajoled. A single minute, he had gathered from Young's interpretation, might mean the loss of precious hours. The fact that Lykoff had been seen at the tea garden, while it appeared to temper the older man's perturbation, had but whetted the younger's avid craving for the truth.

As yet he had not gone nearly so far on the road to consequences as had Young. Nairne saw simply that Rose of Gold was being kept from him through the connivance of Lykoff. He had reached the belief merely that both she and her great-uncle were practically prisoners at the Hsi-Kyung *yamun*—whereas Young entertained

a fear that Prince Tuang had been done to death in some manner, and that his grand-niece had been spirited away to some obscure place of hiding by the amorously covetous Russian bear. The fact, therefore, that Lykoff was here in Hankow, accompanied by a brace of houris, apparently of such diverting qualities as wholly to divert him, he chose to regard as a most fortuitous respite, at least so far as Tuang Kwei-hua was concerned.

It was, nevertheless, with no unmixed satisfaction that he detected while still some little distance away—at the final twist in the thoroughfare, in fact—that Wong Chee's shop front still glowed under the illumination of its lamps, with their gaily colored pictures of birds, flowers, gardens and temples, and its lanterns which brought into high relief and easy visibility, the long hanging signboards—so boldly lettered in vermilion and gold.

NOT until the jinrikisha, though, was abreast of the shop and halting, did he obtain a view of the squat, bespectacled and pig-tailed figure of his old friend, the tailor, sitting motionless and inscrutable as a carved Buddha behind his counter. Very nimbly he alighted in advance of his hasted companion, and signalling the coolies to wait, entered the shop with Nairne at his heels.

The formalities of greeting and the introduction of the American at length accomplished, Yeng Sen—as Young was known to the tradesman—began a somewhat roundabout approach to the subject at issue. Gathering from this that the visit was neither one of business nor disinterested friendship, Wong Chee suggested that his guests retire with him to the tiny, stone-paved court, or yard, in the rear of the shop, at the same time calling his chief assistant to take his place behind the counter.

Here, under a little tent of starry sky, bounded on all four sides by the closely encroaching buildings which surrounded it, and adorned by a few potted flowering plants, stools were provided and an apprentice served visitors and host with warm *samshu*, a liquor distilled from boiled rice, and drunk from diminutive cups.

Young did little more than introduce the object of their late call. The story of what had happened he left for Nairne to narrate. And the young American put it as succinctly, as he knew how. Of one thing only

he was very sure, and that was that Hsi-Kyung, in the most diplomatic way possible, had made it clear to him that his presence at the *yamun* was no longer desirable. Nairne had previously told the mandarin that he was on his way to Hankow and was anxious to recover sufficient of his clothing, which had been sent ahead, to continue his journey. When this, through the offices of his host, was accomplished, repeated reminders of his purpose were not lacking. Hsi-Kyung did not openly urge. He simply congratulated. He spoke of how fortunate his guest was to be able to keep his Hankow engagements with no further delay.

THE rotund Wong Chee listened attentively without interrupting. At the conclusion of the recital he asked:

"You not see allee samee Lykoff some more?" He was extremely proud of his business, or "pidgin," English and never missed a chance to air it; as in this case, for instance, though he had just had an extended demonstration of Nairne's fluency in the standard or mandarin dialect of his own tongue.

"Not at Hsi-Kyung's. Not until here, tonight, at the tea garden," was the answer.

Wong Chee relapsed for a moment into meditative silence. It was then that Yeng Sen volunteered:

"My friend left the *yamun* this morning and came by the backway. Hsi-Kyung provided boat and coolies."

"Me thinker flen' belong p'laps Lykoff chop-chop junk," observed the pensive tailor. And he went on to explain that the Russian possessed a very fast steam yacht which, aided and abetted by the swift current of the Yangtze, frequently covered the river route between Shasi and Hankow in seven hours. This "chop-chop junk," he added, had gone down the river in the very early morning and had anchored, he assumed, off Kiukiang. One of his shopmen, he said, who had been over to Wu-chang for a late visit had seen it, and his sampan had narrowly escaped being swamped by the wash of its churning propeller.

"Vellee often many time Lykoff allee samee bling girlo on chop-chop junk," Wong Chee at length conveyed. "How fashion? Can do, no can do. Catchee girlo, maskee how." Which, being translated, meant that it was a question whether in this case he had carried Tuang Kwei-hua on his yacht to Kiukiang, but that he had

the reputation of abducting young women, no matter what his method.

To Nairne's face came first, for all its bronzing, a deathly pallor born of the picture drawn by his imagination; for the limning of which his heart for the moment ceased pulsing, and his utterance was choked. But the next instant his skin flushed to a carmine as rage succeeded apprehension. The veins in his neck and temples were surcharged so that they stood out like wires. And his fingernails, driven by the tensed muscles of his clenched hands cut through the cuticle of his palms.

Young, calmly self-possessed, merely asked a question: "Is the mandarin Hsi-Kyung one of Boris Lykoff's body-and-soul-bought liegemen?"

Nairne heard it, and he saw too the fat and placid Wong Chee nod his answer. When his old friend had suggested in the rickshaw the domination of the official by the Muscovite he had suffered alarm, but what he gathered in possibilities was limited. At no time had he conceived the possibility of Lykoff being able to separate Rose of Gold from Prince Tuang, except, perhaps, by another attack on the *yamun* by the outlaw forces that he controlled. At their talk in the summerhouse Lykoff had appeared to base all his hopes of what he pretended was a mere unselfish desire for the safety of the young woman on gaining her great-uncle's consent to her accepting the sanctuary of his dwelling. He had left her, personally determined against the proposal, for the expressed purpose of winning Prince Tuang to his plan. Then had come that message that her kinsman desired to see her, and she had vanished like the light of a snuffed candle.

MANY times since morning Nairne had chidden himself for consenting to leave the *yamun* without some definite news of the little Manchu princess. Hsi-Kyung had assured him that she was well, and a certain delicacy had forbidden him asking corroboration of one of Prince Tuang's suite of retainers. He had caught a whisper that the Prince had had a slight relapse, and he had comforted himself as well as he might with the deduction that it was because of this that Rose of Gold had been sent for, and that she was probably with him, exercising her trained natural capacity as nurse.

Still, in view of the possibility of attack, more than hinted at by Lykoff, there was

really no excuse for his leaving when he did, welcome or unwelcome. This he had told himself again and again during his long journey, but it was evoked, as he very well knew, more by a longing to see again this fairest maid in all Cathay than by any belief in a real jeopardy. And now, suddenly, he was face to face with more than a possibility that she had already been spirited away from the *yamun* at the time of his last interview with Hsi-Kyung.

"Lykoff velly muchee wantee girlo, me savey, no come way in chop-chop junk 'fore catchee," gave Wong Chee as his ultimate, deliberately considered judgment, following his nod to the Americanized Chinaman. And it brought the enraged Owen Nairne to his feet with a bound.

"Good God!" he cried in a frenzy. "You mean that? All that is implied in that? But see here! We've just seen him. He's here in Hankow with two other women. If he took her to Kiukiang in his yacht this morning, why should he be in Hankow to-night with these?"

WONG CHEE very nearly smiled.

"How fashion?" he repeated. "Can do. No can do."

"It's quite possible," said Young. "He has a house at Kiukiang, that is only equaled by that on the Yangtze above here."

And the fat tailor amplified further by explaining that the "chop-chop junk" was continually running back and forth on the river between the two residences.

"Which means," Nairne gathered, as he threw away one cigarette only nervously to light another, "that my Rose of Gold may be a prisoner in either one."

"Listen!" said Wong Chee, dropping his "pidgin" talk for his native tongue. "At Kiukiang is a porcelain dealer I know, named Fu Ting. For four years he has been waiting a chance to give Lykoff the *lingchih*." By this he meant the lingering death, involving crucifixion and a slow slicing with sharp knives. "Lykoff makes no move that Fu Ting is not informed of. Any day, any hour, his opportunity may come. He has his confederates in both Lykoff's brick-tea factories; they are in both of Lykoff's houses, too. And they are on his steam yacht as well. I will give you a chit to Wu Fing. He will tell you where the young lady is."

He disappeared into his shop. Nairne paced impatiently the limited confines of

the yard. Young sat in silence. In less than five minutes, which seemed hours to the American, Wong Chee returned with a small, folded bit of red paper, bearing Chinese characters.

"His hong is in the Street of Sevenfold Brightness," he said, handing the chit to his old friend. "He will not fail you. You may be sure of that."

The return journey through the narrow, ill-smelling streets of the native city occupied considerably less time than did their coming. The best part of an hour had been occupied in the visit, and the advance of night had very obviously thinned out the throngs of pedestrians and vehicles. Nairne was for hastening straight to the bund, intent upon securing the fleetest craft available for the one hundred and eighty-seven mile expedition down the Yangtze. But Young insisted that the few minutes involved in a halt at the English Club, primarily for additional funds, and secondarily for at least one change of raiment, was imperative; and his counsel prevailed.

Just how fortunate it was that he carried his point the event of itself promptly proved. For no sooner did they appear in the club lobby than they were hailed by one of the uniformed pages with the announcement that a young Chinaman, sitting composedly at its far end, had been waiting for them with a message, ever since shortly after eight o'clock.

CHAPTER IX

THE boy, who was himself Chinese, had spoken to Young, knowing him for a fellow countryman, and having been instructed by the club steward to inform either of these two gentlemen directly one appeared. Nairne, overhearing, failed to catch the plural significance in the announcement, and was, for just a moment, vexed and intolerant over what he could construe only as an interruption tending to the further delay of their purpose.

Young, glancing at him, noted the lowering frown that reflected his annoyance, and made haste to reassure him.

"Most-likely for you, my son," he said. "I know of no one who would desire so urgently to communicate with me."

A flash of hope, swift and passing, was the American's reaction. In that instant his heart bounded under the stimulus of imagined news from Rose of Gold—

bounded, only to sink back heavily again, weighted by the recollection that she must be as ignorant of his whereabouts as was he of hers.

The young Chinaman rose as they approached him and saluted by a graceless tug at his white sailor's cap; for he wore that distinguishing mark of nautical service. Nairne's fancy, still keenly on edge, saw in this the possibility, if not probability, of a communication from Boris Lykoff. Seeing him at the tea garden, the Russian might naturally assume that he was making this club his headquarters, and in order to throw off any possible suspicion regarding Miss Tuang, he could take no more effective means than that of showing the young American some attention.

With this idea still in mind the surprise which awaited him was all the more poignantly awakening when it came in the shape of a rather soiled piece of once white paper which the sailor produced from beneath his blouse and, without hesitation as to for whom it was intended, handed to him. It was without envelope of any kind and, folded once, bore no address.

There are psychometers who can give astounding facts regarding the writer of a letter by the mere touch of the thing, and Nairne at this moment possessed evidently something of the psychometric gift. He knew positively, in that instant, without a shadow of doubt, that in his trembling fingers he held what had been handled hours before by his beloved Manchu maid, and that within its fold he would see for the first time her writing and get her message.

Nor was the elderly Yeng Sen any more in the dark than he. What Nairne gathered in that fraction of a second his countenance, no less than his quivering hands, conveyed to his companion, who waited with stolidly repressed eagerness for the gravely important tidings that both felt sure were now to be theirs.

But something of disappointment, almost of dismay, followed the baring of that temporarily hidden scrawl, written evidently in great haste under high nervous tension, and consisting of but a dozen hardly legible words, including the signature.

"Listen to Li Kai who brings this. Trust him. Rose of Gold."

Nairne passed it to Young, who puzzled over it for nearly a minute, and when he answered the young American's questioning

gaze there was a hint of skepticism in his dim old eyes. "Dare we?" they asked. But Nairne knew that they dare. His query had been of a larger and more emotional sort. It had to do with the cause for the very manifest haste, the trepidation so palpably reflected in the nervous hand. Already his fancy was picturing horrors. If he had questioned his intuition as to the genuineness of the note, the signature must have convinced him. No one but she could have written that, since no one but she and he at the *yamun* had ever heard it.

He made this clear to his friend as with eager haste they led the messenger into one of the smaller, unoccupied card-rooms of the club and took chairs about the central card-table. He was a good-looking lad, this Li Kai, and brighter, apparently—far less stolid—than the great majority of his class. He spoke in one of the coast dialects of south-east China. That is to say it was his native tongue, and though he had acquired considerable fluency in the more common vernacular, it was so tinged at times with this other that Young, who had come originally from the same seaboard province, had to translate it for Nairne's benefit.

THERE was, too, the very pressing necessity of haste. The boy, who was an assistant engineer on Boris Lykoff's yacht, was due on board before midnight, and it now lacked but a half-hour of it. Moreover, Nairne was restless with an eager impatience for action. It galled him to think of the hours already wasted. Had he only spoken to Young of his problem before setting out for dinner at the tea garden, taken a hurried snack here at the club and then made their visit to Wong Chee, they would have been back here, probably, at about the moment of Li Kai's arrival.

The young Chinaman's story, therefore, was limited rather sharply to essentials. The main point was that Miss Tuang, who had expected to be landed at Hankow in the early morning, had passed the bund here long before daylight, and had been carried on to Kiukiang. Coming on deck with the promise of viewing in the early dawn the familiar landmarks of the twin cities of Hankow and Hanyang, with Wuchang on its dragon hill across the Yangtze, she had been surprised to find the yacht anchored in what were to her utterly strange surroundings.

In a rage over what she believed to be the treachery of Boris Lykoff, she had demanded to see him. He came to her, most courteously, and with the most abject apologies. He was extremely sorry, but there had been an accident in the engine room. A piston-head had blown off and they were still a hundred miles from their journey's end. She told him flatly that she did not believe him, and he said he would bring the chief engineer to prove it. But his chief engineer was a crabbed old whisky-soaked Scotsman. And, having finished his run, he was in a dead drunken stupor in his bunk and so, for the purpose, quite unavailable. It thus happened that Li Kai was mustered into the service, with instructions what to say.

"And you lied to her!" cried Nairne, his rage risen to a crisis.

"Only once, sir," was the boy's answer with imperturbable calm. "Once in the presence of Captain Lykoff. I could not do otherwise."

Then, it seemed, that the Russian, believing her reassured, walked purposefully aft, leaving Li Kai to add whatever details to his fabrication he deemed necessary to make it more completely convincing.

Similar resorts to subterfuge had frequently occurred on the yacht *Sonia*, he interjected. Lykoff's business interests were tremendous. Hankow's great choice tea market lasts for six weeks only, and the heads of the great emporiums, or their managers, occupy their residences only from the first of May until the middle of June. But the brick-tea manufacture is another matter. It goes on practically the year round. And Lykoff was indefatigable in the pursuit and building up of this trade. He worked hard while he worked, but he took "his fun where he found it," and just as energetically and relentlessly. He was—to translate freely Li Kai's summing up—a modern Heliogabalus as to sensualism, and as entirely devoid of principle and conscience.

"You mean to say that you dared disobey such a master?" asked Young quietly.

"I had to, sir," the lad answered, and there was something dramatic in the way he said it.

"You had to?" repeated Nairne, still impatient.

Whereupon came the astonishing rejoinder: "Because I recognized Miss Tuang. Think of that! That I, of all

the hands on the yacht, should have been chosen for that duty. I, whom she had nursed back to life, two years ago, in the Red Cross Hospital at Changsha."

"What? What is this?" cried the wizened little man, pulling nervously, for the first time Nairne had ever seen him, at his gray imperial. "A nurse?"

"Yes, yes," the young American confirmed. "That is true. I neglected to tell you. Thank God! You warned her?"

"That was about all I could do, sir," Li Kai answered. "Captain Lykoff was likely to return at any minute. I told her what would happen next. The tea served to her at breakfast would be drugged. She must only pretend to drink it; but she must act as if she had and seem to go into a deep stupor like the patients in the hospital who are given ether. She would be safe then, because the object of making her insensible was to get her from the *Sonia* ashore without trouble, and to Captain Lykoff's home there without danger of her giving an alarm."

"I see. I see," Nairne cried. "Then, landed at Kiukiang, all she would have to do would be to surprise the beggars with an outcry in the street and attract a mob to her rescue."

BUT on this point the young assistant engineer very promptly disabused him. Closely veiled and with at least four of the deck-hands carrying her, she would be hustled from the launch into a closed rickshaw, with the captain beside her. Her escape, if it was to be managed at all, Li Kai said, must come later. He had told her that once at the captain's residence, she must assume illness, resulting from an overdose of the drug in the tea. He knew of cases where such illness had actually occurred, lasting for days, and during which Boris Lykoff, who had a peculiar horror concerning an ailing woman, would be sure to leave her severely alone. As a member of his household, though, there was a young German doctor, who attended such cases, and to deceive him might prove a difficult matter. It was, however, the best the boy could do.

"And this note?" Nairne asked. "When did she give you that?"

"There, on deck, sir. Fortunately I had the bit of paper with me, and a stub of pencil too. So that I was able to supply her when she asked. There was much haste, as I have said, and she was very

agitated lest interruption come. Which it did, so suddenly that I had to crumple the chit in my palm. Captain Lykoff had gone forward by the port gangway, and came upon us from behind. It was good luck that Miss Tuang had given me your name and this address in advance. She was not sure I would find you here; but I was to take the chance."

"Of course you know nothing of her since she was put ashore?" It was Young who asked this.

Li Kai shook his head. "No, sir," he said. "But I know this: Captain Lykoff came back at the end of a couple of hours in a frightful temper. He ordered steam up at once, and in a little while we were headed upstream again for his other home, between here and Tung-ting Lake."

"You take him back there again tonight?" Nairne questioned. "Him' and the two—ladies?"

"I suppose so, sir. And, if I'm to keep my place, I'd best be off."

"And we, too," Young added. "Do you know of a fast boat here that will take us to Kiukiang?"

The Chinaboy had risen, and for a moment he stood thoughtful. Then, just as he was about to speak, he was hailed by a sandy-haired, sturdy young man, who, unnoticed, had for a minute or more been regarding him from between the bamboo hangings of the doorway.

"Well, if it isn't little Li Kai!" he cried in an English that was half American and half Irish.

Nairne and Young, whose shoulders had been turned to the entrance, glanced at the invader of their privacy and got to their feet, not altogether without disconcertion. Reassurance came, though, when, their regard reverting to the native, they observed the gleeful look of recognition which had lighted up his yellow visage.

Another moment and he had run forward and was gripping cordially the newcomer's extended hand. Then, all at once, he started back and paused under the shock of a recurrent thought, looking from one young man to the other.

"I had forgot," he muttered, self-proachfully. "Forgot the most important thing of all. What she was more anxious about than herself. Mr. Nairne was to find Dr. Carey at once and send him quickly, with no loss of time, to her uncle, Prince Tuang Wah-Sing, at Hsi-Kyung's

yamun, near Shasi. He is a very sick man, and to save his life great haste is necessary."

The formality of introduction following this fortuitous meeting could well be dispensed with. There was, though, the usual handshaking all around and the implied if not expressed bond of fealty to the cause of the extraordinary little Manchu princess-nurse.

Then Li Kai, as a final service, recommended a friend of his who possessed a fast steam craft, similar to our tug-boats, called the *Golden Profits*, which could make Kiukiang in about half the time that would be occupied by one of the regular passenger steamers running between the two cities. And Nairne, in turn, suggested to Dr. Carey the boatmen of Hsi-Kyung who had brought him that day by the short route and who would probably be glad to return at any hour a passenger, willing to pay liberally, presented himself.

As the sequel to these propositions one o'clock found the component parts of this recent acquaintanceship—Nairne and Young together and Dr. Carey alone—well started on their grave and urgently pressing missions of relief.

CHAPTER X

ROSE OF GOLD, as Nairne had called her and by which name she liked to think of herself, had played with superb conviction the part so hastily outlined to her as necessary by her one-time patient, little Li Kai. She had played it with the stout heart of the courageous, resolute daughter of a long line of noble and fearless princes, and in the face of not only overwhelming odds, but of a heartbreaking disappointment and soul-racking fear concerning, not so much herself as that great-uncle whom she loved so tenderly and whose life she believed was in direct jeopardy. All that night on the yacht *Sonia* she had lain wide awake, counting the minutes which dragged so endlessly into hours, only to confront at dawn the appalling realization, first that her errand was to be perhaps hopelessly prolonged, and second that this prolongation was not an accident, unforeseen and unavoidable, but the intentional and brutal working out of a devilishly conceived and treacherously executed

plot of the unspeakable Boris Lykoff's for her abduction.

However, in the face of so benumbing a revelation, this girl, naturally heroic, and trained by teaching and experience to cope with emergencies as presented, had maintained wonderfully her poise, thankful for the divinely provided coincidence of Li Kai's presence, and clear-headedly availing herself of the possible opportunity thus presented of getting tidings of the double plight of Prince Tuang Wah-Sing and herself to both Owen Nairne and Dr. Carey. She was not blind to the fact that the possibility of this communication rested on the barest chance. Whether or not Li Kai would be able to get to Hankow that day or a week hence was pure conjecture. Neither was there any certainty that, when he did so, he should find either one or both of the men sought. Nevertheless, the mere effort had a distinctly bracing and buoying effect. It was it, more than anything else, which stayed her for the ordeal of pretense to which she had committed herself.

The Kiukiang residence of the great brick-tea prince was located on the edge of the foreign settlement; and though its construction was limited to the building materials readily available, it bore a somewhat striking resemblance to the average German *Schloss*. It was what might be called Lykoff's winter palace, for the climate here is almost insufferable in summer owing to the cooling south winds being cut off by the great mountain, Lien-shan. His home beyond Hankow was therefore preferable at this season, but for certain reasons, obvious enough, he had chosen the Kiukiang castle in which to cage his most recently captured little bird of paradise.

The suite in which she found herself on being unveiled, and about which she squinted between imperceptibly lifted lids and through her heavy fringe of eyelashes, was both spacious and elegant; and, with its massive and richly carved furniture, all evidently imported from Russia, bore a striking resemblance to the rooms in European royal palaces that are to be viewed by tourists at so much a head. The bed on which she lay stood on a raised platform or dais, was surmounted by a tester, the carving of which was picked out in gold, and heavily curtained with crimson velvet hangings. Each wall had its mirror, and each mirror reflected not only chairs of all sizes and patterns, but mammoth chests of drawers, dressing tables, wardrobes, and

even curio cases. She could see too in these mirrors parts of an adjoining boudoir, a dressing-room, and a well-appointed bathroom.

She lay very still where the carriers had placed her, and in the moment following their departure was so interested in her peeping survey of her quarters that she did not at first realize the presence of one remaining attendant. The chamber was indeed in the semi-gloom of lowered blinds and partially drawn curtains; and had it not been that her eyes were shaded, from the outside glare before entering, first by the enclosed Sedan chair, and always by her veil and lowered lids, she would have been as blind to the rooms and their furnishing as she was to the elderly, angular-faced Chinawoman who turned slowly from where she had been standing in an embrasure of one of the windows.

Rose of Gold regarded her surreptitiously as she had regarded the other objects in the suite, yet with a very different interest. The inanimate things had provoked and elicited only an idle curiosity, or at most a furtively casual contemplation of presumptive hiding places, weapons of defense, and doubtful avenues of escape. This creature of her own sex stirred her at first sight with a less gloomy, if not very persuasive, suggestion of potential deliverance. But as she drew nearer to the bed, softly, with lagging steps, the girl viewed her with, if not misgiving, certainly with no quickening of assurance. She saw that she was much older than she imagined. Her skin was a network of seams and a tracery of fine wrinkles. Her eyes were small, beadlike and very deeply set, and Rose of Gold fancied she detected craft in them. Her mouth was a straight, sunken lipless line, beneath a rudimentary nose, so squat as to be nearly lost between sharply jutting, high cheekbones. She wore the native costume, including a sort of skullcap, all of funereal black.

Even at the moment of her highest hope the little Manchu had not contemplated an immediate appeal. She would play her part as Li Kai had directed. But she had hoped feebly that when this temporarily gained respite expired she might in this attendant find aid to prolong it, if nothing more, until, through the good and efficient offices of the Chinaboy and Owen Nairne, extrinsic succor should arrive.

That which now began to perplex her was whether or not she was prolonging the

stupor stage to a point that might arouse suspicion. Li Kai had given her no hint on this question. Neither had he told her—it was doubtful if he knew—the drug employed to effect the insensibility that she was feigning. She had fancied that it was some form of opium, or perhaps chloral, the actions of which from her hospital observation she knew very well. But the quantity swallowed—or supposed to be swallowed—would make a wide difference in the lasting effect. She had chosen to take it for granted that the dosage was just short of the danger point. Yet it might not be. It might, indeed, be barely sufficient to cover the estimated time involved in the abduction. Moreover it might have been neither of the opiates she assumed.

THE approach of the Chinawoman, who had now come close to the bedside and was, she knew, gazing appraisingly down upon her, afforded her little assistance in reaching a conclusion. But the woman's next move made it imperative that she should rouse practically at once, or, on the other hand, provoke grave suspicion. For two bonelike fingers had found the pulse in her left wrist and were noting the beats of a heart which that touch had set wildly to racing.

It was not so much the mere physical contact that had this effect of frightened acceleration. It was more the sudden and horrifying conviction that she was in the custody of no mere indifferent watcher, old, decrepit and, perhaps, simple-minded, but rather the prisoner—the fly in the web—of an ancient and experienced spider. Others—God alone, probably knew how many—had been there before her in like defenselessness; snared, but lacking the consciousness—so accidentally hers. On their wrists, too, those fingers had stolen. Their pulsations, too, had been counted. And for what? Because somewhere under this roof, within these castle walls, there had waited then, just as there waited now, that repulsive ogre of a Muscovite.

To have opened her eyes at that moment would have been to betray the insurgent frenzy that surmounted her terror. If she was to postpone what, by one false step, must become a present inevitability, she must rouse slowly to a dazed sensibility. With all her forces she exerted herself to effect this self-control. But the time given her was brief. The hand, assured of the

truth, dropped the wrist to clutch the plumply curving shoulder in a bruising clawlike grip. It clutched it and roughly shook it. Shook, indeed, the whole perfect figure; while the mouth of the crone, close to the girl's ear, emitted strange, high-pitched yet raucously discordant sounds that made her flesh creep with horror.

Still, though, she maintained her semblance of inertness, until three sharply stinging slaps from the bony hand on her face wrung from her a cry of rebellious pain and involuntarily jerked her own arms upward in self-defense. Then, only, with the lifting of her lids, did her assailant desist.

With consummate skill, marvelous under the circumstances, little Rose of Gold managed to sink her indignation beneath a perfectly feigned astonishment. She lifted herself on one elbow and stared in a dazed, questioning bewilderment about the great room, permitting her eyes at length to return, still puzzled and doubting, to her custodian who stood regarding her with a stolid imbecile indifference.

"Wh—what is this place?" she stammered in question. "H—how did I come here?"

The creature's only answer was to point to her own mouth and one of her ears, and then to shake her hideous head in sign of negation. She was deaf and dumb. And at the discovery Rose of Gold's last hope of possible sympathy, much less aid, quietly gave up the ghost.

Upon her very small self, and that small self only, she had now wholly to depend. The next instant she appeared to be taken with an intolerable nausea. Her tiny hands went frantically to the pit of her small stomach. She bent forward over them, and her face of transparent roseleaf behind which a golden light shone, became distorted with agony. To make the semblance all the more real—not for the crone who could not hear, but purely for her own conviction—she groaned. Then presently, she plunged in seeming panic for the edge of the bed and, with a frantic gesture towards her lips and an equally frantic appeal in her eyes directed at her surprised body-guard, she leaned over the bedside, her head depending.

When, half an hour later, Boris Lykoff entered the room unbidden, his captive was apparently sleeping. The woman, who had been seated beside her, rose hurriedly and crept to him noiselessly. To Rose of Gold, who watched through her lashes, it

was evident that by means of rather effective pantomime he was being acquainted with what had happened. She observed with no little satisfaction an expression of disgust replace on his features the one of eagerness and then surprise which had been there as she first glimpsed him.

In order to confirm the old woman's testimony it occurred to the little Manchu princess that a repetition for Lykoff's benefit might be effective. She sat up suddenly with a groan that, now having an auditor, she not only prolonged, but repeated. Again she doubled herself over her locked hands which were pressed hard against her gastric center. To her delight she observed out of the tail of her eye that her attendant this time was not going to wait to be motioned to. Already she was disappearing in the direction of the bathroom.

Again Rose of Gold plunged to the bed's edge, supported herself there on her elbows, and leaned far over with hanging head and wide-open mouth. There was an excellent imitation of a sound heard frequently on shipboard in rough weather. The Chinawoman returned running. She returned just in time to—see Lykoff disappear with an oath through the door by which he had entered. The oath was loud and angry, but the crash made by the door which he slammed shut after him was loud enough to drown it and cut it in two.

CHAPTER XI

ALTHOUGH she knew that by thus following to the letter the instructions given her by Li Kai she had attained a certain respite, the lovely and talented little Manchu maid was too clever to minimize the peril which still threatened her. She had deceived the unspeakable Lykoff, but she was by no means sure that she had deceived her shrewd and experienced duenna. She had, indeed, more than once detected in her dim eyes questioning glances, born, she believed, of a lurking mistrust. And then, too, Li Kai had cautioned her concerning the resident German physician whom it might be impossible to impose upon. She fancied that he must very soon present himself, and the nervous tension of expectancy, coupled as it was not only with her own sense of impending danger, but with anxiety concerning her great-uncle, far outweighed the little satis-

faction of having won the first rubber in the game for such high stakes with her implacable captor.

She lay again, now, very quietly with closed eyes, pretending to sleep. The room was as silent as a tomb to which no sound penetrated from without. The old woman in black had fetched a chair to the bedside and sat there, plying mechanically a fan, and watching her with a gaze that was pitiless and unrelenting. Once, after what seemed hours but may have been only minutes, this dragon arose, seized suddenly it appeared by an impulse mentally to torture, rather than physically to make more comfortable, and attempted to remove Rose of Gold's clothing. The effort ended, however, in complete failure. The width of the bed, which was extraordinary, and the far superior agility of the young prisoner, who easily eluded her tormentor by rolling or jumping out of reach, very soon winded the attacking party, who relapsed once again into her attitude of indefatigable watching and waiting, and fanning.

The daughter of princes chose then the far side of her resting place and no longer lay with lids lowered. She, too, kept uninterrupted vigil. But as the long minutes crawled by another form of enemy combatted her. In forty-eight hours she had had less than four hours of sleep. Nor had those, snatched between eight A. M. and noon following the attack on the *yamun*, been undisturbed. Despite haunting terror and harrowing solicitude, Nature demanded her toll of slumber. Drowsiness seized upon the girl, numbing her resistance, drugging her caution and weighting her eyelids. How desperately, with every atom of will she could command, she fought this enfolding somnolence! Again and again, on the point of succumbing utterly, she rallied valorously and freed herself. More than once she sat up, fixing her gaze upon that inexorable witness of her plight, sitting like a figure of Doom itself, sculptured in ebon marble, and wearing, she thought, an exultant leer of victory. This, if anything, it seemed to her, must serve to keep her awake. But each time the vision dimmed. Each time her head drooped and she slipped inertly back into recumbency and insensibility, until at length, her rallying forces overcome, she was lost completely to all consciousness of time, place, and conditions. She slept, quietly and sweetly, a tiny hand between the pillow and her cheek: a cheek into

which came slowly the delicate pink of a roseleaf glowing in a mellow golden light.

It was so that young Dr. Gessler saw her first. Very softly he had entered; a slender, fair-haired, beardless man of thirty-odd, in loose pongee. The woman he knew as Chi-i, started to rise. But he gestured to her to remain seated, and crossed on tiptoe to the bed's foot.

"*Gott!*" he exclaimed under his breath. "*Das liebe Kind.*"

FOR some minutes he stood there fascinated by the picture, his expression one of admiration purely. Then, as soundlessly as he had entered, he moved to where, before one of the windows, was an *escritoire*. When he rose from it he carried with him a half-sheet of note paper written over in vertical lines of Chinese characters. They were questions answerable by a nod or a shake of the head, or by upheld fingers. By means of them Chi-i informed him that the young lady on the bed had had no return of the nausea since Lykoff saw her. She had noticed no other symptoms. She had been sleeping for between two and three hours. She had eaten nothing. She had drunk nothing.

By pantomime the physician directed that she was not to be disturbed. When she awoke, Chi-i was to ring for him. Then he went out as quietly as he had come in.

Rose of Gold slept until early evening. In all those hours she barely changed her position. It was a sleep of exhaustion, and she awakened from it much refreshed and not a little surprised. Her duenna, apparently, had not moved from her chair. Rose of Gold took from the pocket beneath her skirt of apricot silk her tiny jeweled watch and saw that it was nearly half-past eight. She could hardly believe it, but her watch was ticking, and it never lied. What gave it confirmation, too, was her appetite. She was very hungry and she was also very thirsty. But did she dare ask for anything? Might not her calling be but the signal that Boris Lykoff was waiting for? As she considered this, the watcher rose from her chair and stepped to the wall, towards which she extended a bony forefinger. And Rose of Gold knew that the signal over which she debated had been dispatched.

Ten minutes passed, and then a white-uniformed, long-pig-tailed Chinaboy appeared with a tray, expertly balanced on

one hand. In the other hand, she observed, he carried a silver wine cooler, the surface of which was pleasingly frosted, and above the rim of which protruded the neck of a champagne bottle.

After depositing the tray on a table and the cooler on the floor the boy drew into the center of unoccupied floor-space between the door and the bed another table. This he spread with a cloth and then, very quickly and expertly, placed in order upon it the contents of the balanced tray.

Interestedly Rose of Gold rose to one elbow the better to see. To her dismay the table was being set, not for herself alone, but for two.

CHAPTER XII

TWELVE hours later, almost to the minute, the river steamboat *Golden Profits*, with a painted eye on each side of her bow to guard against shoals and sunken rocks, and a bird resembling the fabled phoenix in gaudy colors on her stern-board to add to her speed, drove, with forced draft and at no little risk, through the thick mist that hung over the harbor of Kiukiang.

Owen Nairne, standing well forward, his forearms resting on the capstan-head, peered eagle-eyed into the murk for the looming shadows of impeding craft, and from time to time, sang out a warning to the man in the wheel-house, in the Chinese words for "hard a lee" or "hard a port." Because his old friend Young had insisted upon it, he had dozed through the better part of the night, so that he might be more fit for the morning's enterprise. At starting, they had swung about the swift *Sonia*, anchored in midstream with her cabins ablaze with electric lights and her sharp nose pointed against the current, in their diagonal crossing from the jetty at Hankow towards the channel in the lee of the opposite shore. She had lain there afloat on the black water, not so much like a beautiful white swan at rest as like a nun's funeral barge aglow with tapers. The simile was Nairne's, and he shuddered at the thought extended itself: the nun a symbol of virgin innocence, violated and slain. For there was no question, he believed, as to the heinous purposes to which that craft, masked in spotless purity, was devoted. His very soul raged within him as he pictured that red-lipped, white-

toothed, black-bearded Moloch of a Russian, Boris Lykoff, as he had seen and heard him only yesterday, so smoothly persuasive, so anxiously persistent in his plea to dear little Rose of Gold. It was the old nursery rhyme of the spider and the fly over again. And by what a marvelous fortuity had she thus far escaped? How miraculously had one thing after another combined to spare her! Here, now, at that very moment, was not some benign agency at work? With each passing second the yacht and her master were being left helplessly behind. Overconfidence on the part of the Muscovite was to prove, inevitably, his Nemesis. Long before he could possibly return to Kiukiang the rescue of Rose of Gold would be effected. Young was positive of it. They had but to deliver that bit of red paper to Fu Ting at his hong in the Street of Sevenfold Brightness to set at work the machinery of his Eumenides. And that machinery would not fail.

Thus assured, Nairne had slept lightly, and his dreams had been sanguinely colored. But with the first faint tint of dawn he was astir. In the tiny cabin tea and rice were served. And then, with a lighted cigarette between his lips, he had gone forward, taking up his station by the capstan. As their speeding tug neared its destination and the sun rose higher and higher above the range of limestone hills to the northeast, the brown Yangtze threw up from its bosom an ever-thickening curtain of yellow mist which was far more threatening than had been the dark. The river here, too, had become, at each mile gained, more thickly dotted with every sort of floating craft from great foreign freighters and native war-junks to small river-trading junks and the inevitable *sha-teng* or sampans.

THEN, suddenly, through the screen of vapor there bulked before them to starboard the long gray crenelated wall that marks the location of Kiukiang, the native city; and the engineer of the *Golden Profits* cut off his steam in response to the order of "half-speed ahead." Almost at the same moment Nairne's ringing voice sounded a hurried and imperative "Hard a lee!" For directly in their path, with the instantaneousness of a lightning flash, there had emerged the graceful snow-white contour of a yacht's starboard quarter. Another second and a collision must inevitably have

occurred. But the wheelman's prompt action swerved his little vessel to the right just in time, so that she missed shaving the yacht's side by a matter of inches.

Nairne, who by putting out a hand could have touched her, stood spellbound. In that instant of deviation he had caught glimpsingly a flutter of colors abaft the stern awnings. They were colors familiar enough in all conscience, for they were those of his own flag. But they were differently arranged. They showed in three horizontal stripes, with the white at the top and the red and blue beneath; an arrangement which he knew for the Russian merchant ensign. His heart had quailed at the sight, though reason told him that it was idle to assume there was no other Russian-owned yacht than Boris Lykoff's in this overridden land of Russian commercial supremacy. Another second,—barely more though,—and his conviction was confirmed. For staring at him in shining letters of brass near the yacht's bow was that name he had come to loathe: "*Sonia*."

SO Lykoff had not gone to his summer palace above Hankow. What a fool he had been to suppose that he would! After all why should he have taken the word of that Chinaboy? At that moment, in all probability, the Russian was still at the Hankow tea garden. He should have gone back there and, having made sure, secured his arrest on a charge of abduction, holding Li Kai as a witness. Either that or he should have bribed Li Kai, if necessary, to smuggle him onto the yacht. Then, at least, they would have started even here at Kiukiang. Or he might have found opportunity while on board, to grapple with the beast, and perhaps unobserved to have thrown him into the Yangtze; for, for all Lykoff's great bulk, Nairne believed him physically no match for himself. A sensualist is rarely of any great muscular power or prowess.

But because he had done none of these things this march had been stolen on him in the night. The thought of having slept the hours away in ease, of having dreamed of Rose of Gold rescued and in his arms, maddened him with an unbearable shame and remorse.

He turned about suddenly to face the imperturbable Young.

"Damn it all," he cried in a fury. "He's blocked our game. We're too late. I

wouldn't give a *cash* for our chances of success now."

The old man pulled reflectively an end of his gray mustache.

"He who knows failure," he said, sagely, "with a mite of unexerted effort in his kit, is a knave and a coward."

Nairne stared perplexedly. "Haven't you seen?" he asked. "Don't you know—?"

"I've seen and I know," his old friend cut in. "That doesn't alter matters. I thought you told me that at Yale you were on your baseball team. I was something of a fan once myself. For two seasons in New York I never missed a day of the Giants on the home grounds. Bear in mind that a game's never won or lost until the last man is out. We'll be ashore in five minutes, and then we must work fast. I don't suppose you saw little Li Kai. I did. He had his head out of a port hole."

"Much good that does," growled Nairne, savagely.

"Possibly no; possibly yes," Young returned cryptically.

The rejoinder touched after a moment the American's consciousness. His chin lifted and there was an awakened interest in his snapping, wider-eyed glance.

"You mean?" he asked.

"He hailed me. But cautiously. Some of his words didn't carry. But—"

"But?"

"Six I caught."

"And they?"

"In an hour! *On the bund!*"

The flame of Nairne's eagerness was quenched in an instant.

"A needle in a haystack," he grumbled. "The bund! Yards wide, miles long and crowded from edge to edge."

Young shrugged his drooping and not overbroad shoulders.

"Meanwhile," he said, turning about, "we will have talked with Fu Ting."

"Meanwhile," echoed Nairne, "the spider will have possessed the fly." But before the echo faded, his friend, reaching back, had caught his arm.

"Look! See!" he directed, pointing with his other hand to where the *Sonia* rode at anchor in midstream.

A bulky figure in white had suddenly appeared under the awning of the after-deck and stood now leaning against the rail.

"By all that's good!" murmured Nairne under his breath. "Lykoff!"

CHAPTER XIII

A CLOCK of emerald-green malachite on an exquisite cabinet, glittering with mother-of-pearl and ormolu, chimed the hour of ten that same morning in the boudoir of the suite in which the loveliest and daintiest of Manchu princesses was held captive. At a snowily naperied table, softly aglitter with silver, crystal and porcelain, Rose of Gold and Dr. Gessler were amicably breakfasting. Nor was there, so far as the casual observer could detect, any indication of anxiety, timidity, or even nervousness on the part of either of them. On the other hand they appeared, not merely perfectly at ease, but actually enjoying themselves. Yet in neither case was this wholly un-simulated.

When, on the previous evening, the young German physician had elected to dine with the young woman whom he had been given orders to observe, he had chosen a line of conduct or course of action which he believed best fitted the case. It was a plan that in the past had worked out satisfactorily more than once. Indeed, on three or four occasions it had profited him personally. And he was by no means averse to such a benefit in this instance. With Chinawomen of the ordinary type he was long ago satiated. But he possessed the seeing eye for feminine loveliness, and had always had a leaning towards the exotic. His first sight of Rose of Gold, flushed with slumber, had attracted him strongly, wringing from him that low-voiced expletive and phrase of appreciation in his native tongue. She was like a perfectly formed and featured doll made animate.

Like a great many of his race he was the personification of craftiness and cruelty. Moreover, he was richly endowed with the gifts of the born Thespian. He was an adept at dissemblance. So that it was a comparatively easy matter, he believed, by assuming the rôle of sympathizer, to win his way into her confidence and elicit her gratitude.

But Rose of Gold was no less consummate an actress than was he an actor. To hide and to dissemble her real reactions and emotions was with her a sort of second nature. Her powers of discernment, too, were extraordinary. Intuition was a gift lavishly furnished her by the gods. Thus, she was not in the least deceived as to

Dr. Gessler's ulterior purpose. She knew that his pretended sorrow for her was the rankest kind of an assumption. But she was wise enough not to let him see that she knew. On the contrary she played up to him. She fairly inundated him with assurances of her appreciation. She was at times coy to him, and then, again, bold. At one moment shy, blushing; and at the next almost flippantly indecorous. Yet all the while, deep within her, never absent, was the uncertainty concerning the delivery of her messages to Nairne and to Dr. Carey, and the dread horror of Boris Lykoff's return.

It was of this latter that she had spoken first, this morning, when Gessler joined her for breakfast. And for the tenth time at least he had answered:

"Have no fear, my dear. He will not enter here until I say that he may. You are in my hands. He put you there himself and I shall not release you until I feel so disposed." He bowed stiffly from the waist, adding: "I assure you that if he sees you again ever it will be yourself that is to blame."

At this she had smiled winsomely enough, and a bit shyly, as she explained:

"Oh, yes. I know that. I'm sure of it. I merely wished to know whether he was back here in Kiukiang."

"And that is of no consequence whatever. As a fact I do not know. Personally I have not seen him. For all I know he may be in Peking or on his way there."

THE day without was one of oppressive heat and humidity. The torrid air, heavy with moisture, was lifeless as a steamed blanket. But within the high-ceiled, latticed and curtained boudoir, where but a half-light entered, strained through lowered blinds, there was still the comparatively dusky coolness borrowed from the night.

Rose of Gold, very fresh and flowerlike after her bath, her low, narrow brow half hidden by her little straight-cut ebon bang—that signifies in China the unmarried—faced the studiously plausible Teutonic Don Juan across the circular table, playing tantalizingly with him his battle-dore-and-shuttlecock-like game of equivocation.

"Oh, Dr. Gessler!" she was saying now. "You are so clever. I don't see why you should bury yourself here in Kiukiang. The world needs such as you so very much."

He smiled proudly, his vanity being prodigious, as he replied: "Until yesterday I did not know the reason either. It has always harassed me to be so limited in opportunity, when I might have put my name at the very top of the roll of the world's great thinkers and scientists. But, beneath all my perplexity on this point, I felt that Fate held me here for some unfathomable purpose."

"Really?" she cried, gazing at him with wide, eagerly interested eyes. "How wonderful! Do tell me what it was."

He waited a moment before answering. Then, narrowing his lids, and leaning towards her, very low, yet very intensely, he half whispered, half breathed a single word.

"You!"

"I?" she threw back in seeming astonishment.

"You!" he repeated in a louder tone.

"Oh, I understand," she rejoined, her face brightening. "It was written in your book of fate, you mean, that you were to be here to save me from Boris Lykoff. I wonder if that can really be so."

"Ah, but more than that," he went on. "Much more. I knew it as soon as my eyes rested on you, sleeping. My heart told me that you had come to me at last. My mate. It was for you that I had been guided to China five years ago. It was for you that I had been directed to accept this subordinate position with a contemptible Russian in all ways my inferior."

"You honestly believe that?" she questioned naïvely.

"Believe it? It is not a matter of believing. I know it. I know it as certainly as I know that I am alive."

Her countenance was a picture of infant innocence.

"But suppose I do not love you enough to—" She paused a second, interrupting herself with: "I admire you. I like you. You have been very good to me. Perhaps—yes, probably, in time I might—I'm pretty sure I might—well, care for you enough to—to marry you."

Gessler laughed a bit rudely.

"But don't you see," he said, "that when Fate has decreed a thing we, ourselves, have to accept what's planned for us? You have been mine since last evening. Destiny has already wed us. This is our nuptial breakfast. To spare you any embarrassment I have sent away Chi-i."

Little Rose of Gold's heart quailed with-

in her. All along she had been pinning her safety, so to speak, to the deaf mute. It was she who, in the opinion of the captive, represented Boris Lykoff. Hers was an office not only of watchfulness but of guardianship. She had never for a moment believed that Gessler, despite his boasting, had any authority over Chi-i. And it was still difficult to realize that he had. Nevertheless, the possibility that he spoke the truth and that she was alone with him in those rooms was too terrifying to treat lightly. Still she could not afford to weaken or give the least sign of trepidation.

"I didn't understand," she confessed. "But, of course, you, being wise, know best. After breakfast, then, you are going to take me away on a honeymoon? That will be a great joke on Boris Lykoff when he returns from Peking."

HER seeming ingenuousness was like a dash of cold water in his face. It was as though having planned to embrace a beautiful woman, he had seen her magically transformed into an infant. The effect, though, was but briefly temporary. Suddenly something very like the truth dawned upon his consciousness. She was playing with him. She thought him a fool that she could use. The conception enraged him. That was what he had got for showing her some consideration: for treating her with a delicacy such as in all his checkered amorous career he had shown to no other woman.

Without a word he pushed back from the table his chair, and, dropping his napkin to the floor, was at her side in a single stride. In spite of her, her cheeks blanched and panic terror stared from out her eyes, as she shrank away from him.

"Yes-s-s!" he hissed at her between clenched teeth, as he caught her up in his arms and pressed her to him roughly in an embrace that smothered the cry rising to her lips. "After breakfast our honeymoon begins—*here*."

The little Manchu quivered in the crushing clutch of steel muscles like a snared bird. Vainly in that first instant of seizure did she strive mentally for some means of escape. The horror that impended stunned her intellect, as those encircling arms benumbed and bruised her flesh. Ordinarily resourceful to the point of genius, she was now incapable of devising a single expedient.

After what seemed to her a long moment,

endlessly protracted, she was conscious of Gessler taking a step forward, and then, with an oath kicking away the chair in which, so very, very long ago, she had sat at breakfast. But that which followed passed with the speed of electrical flashes. There had been no word spoken, no sound save that of the overturned chair. But those arms had snapped away from her in release far more swiftly than they had encompassed her. She had been dropped suddenly and jarringly to the floor to see her captor retreating a pace, his startled eyes fixed on something behind her.

The thought of rescue shot new life to her every fiber. Owen Nairne had come at last, as she always believed he must come, at the moment of crisis. She turned in the twinkle of an eye. But only to start back, too, as had Gessler. The draperies dividing boudoir and bedchamber had been parted just enough to admit the figure of a man, who was standing now between them in the dim, cool light of the room with the disordered table and the overturned chair. But it was not the figure of Owen Nairne.

It was a much heavier figure, though of equal height. It was a figure clad in palest pongee and topped by a *sola topi* of snowy whiteness. A figure doubly blanched by its dark background and the jet black of the beard which spread like a great blot of ink between the drooping brim of the chalky pith-helmet and the tallow-like pallidity of the closely buttoned silken coat—the terrifying figure of that omnipotent Russian, Boris Lykoff.

Which of the surprised ones was most in panic is a question; for Rose of Gold was naturally courageous, while Gessler was at heart a craven of cravens. The tension of the moment and its pregnant stillness were a heartbreaking torture. Each cowered breathless awaiting the word which would shatter the spell. But the giant form, like a sculptured Nemesis, neither moved nor spoke. Seconds crawled agonizingly by without promise of relief.

In the end it was Gessler who weakened. He stumbled, rather than stepped, a pace backward. It may have been that his impulse was to plunge to freedom through the latticed window he knew to be there. But he had forgotten the table behind him. It was a heavy, massive thing, and unyielding it caught him, striking him on the upper thigh and disturbing his balance.

And, as he swayed in an effort at re-

covery, the hitherto stationary figure between the curtains sprang forward, flung itself upon him, bore him down backward, rained upon his face and head a torrent of blows that first staggered his senses and then smothered them.

Rose of Gold saw his arms drop limply, his neck lose its last semblance of rigidity. And then she saw his body slip over the table-edge and fall heavily to the floor. But, even in that same instant of vision, she had been suddenly lifted up in an embrace, not rough, but tender, and as with closed eyes she would shut from her sight the loathful visage of her captor, close to her ear she heard whispered:

"Sh! Not a sound, darling. And you'll be safe as a mouse in a cheese." It was the figure of Lykoff; but the voice was Nairne's.

CHAPTER XIV

THE shop of Fu Ting, the porcelain dealer, in the Street of Sevenfold Brightness, was not by any means an emporium. It was, to outward view at least, as small and insignificant a hong as was to be found in all the city of Kiukiang. It was crowded in between a score or more almost precisely like it, on a narrow ill-smelling thoroughfare close to the city gate, all of which sold exactly the same hideous parodies on old designs done in the same dirty pigments and dingy glazes. There was a time when Fu Ting, under quite a different name, was at the head of a great porcelain exporting house in Peking, and there he had accumulated a very considerable fortune. A goodly part of this he had expended and was still expending to bring to him, after years of inimitable patience, that which of all things he most longed for; to sit with folded hands in a chair carved with dragons and see Boris Lykoff stretched before him on a great cross and skillfully cut into very narrow strips.

Oddly enough, when the Americanized Yeng Sen who, carrying the chit from Wong Chee, had gone straight from the landing-place to the porcelain shop, set eyes upon Fu Ting, recognition—mutual recognition indeed—was practically instantaneous. It is regarded as a truism among foreigners that all Chinese look alike. But to the native, the distinguishing marks of feature are as limitlessly varied as are those of any other race.

Yeng Seng identified him at once as the exporter, Kow Mop, of old Peking days. And Fu Ting, after a moment of hesitation, admitted the impeachment by addressing him as "Venerable Yeng." Yet Fu Ting, save for being less portly, looked enough like Wong Chee to be his twin brother.

In as few words as possible Young outlined to this recovered acquaintance the entire situation, taking pains, however, in no manner to spare the Russian from the excoriation he deserved and that would, he knew, not merely gratify this sworn avenger but go far towards eliciting his widest and wisest coöperation.

Coming down to the events of the earlier morning he briefly narrated the story of their coming ashore and Nairne's sudden inspiration at the sight of an outfitter's hong on the bund.

"It is a good place to leave our dunnage," he said to me with a grin; the first I had seen him wear that day." Young proceeded. "But once we were inside, he began looking about for pongees. What he was up to I couldn't imagine. He had been fretting himself sick, it seemed, over waiting a bit for Li Kai. With that cowardly wolf of the steppes still aboard the *Sonia*, I had argued that haste was of not such importance that we had any right to miss what the boy wished to tell us. It might be something very vital. But he had insisted that before we could get to you and formulate a plan Lykoff might easily come ashore, and once in his own house again, the devil himself couldn't get him. Yet here he was nosing about that outfitter's place as if he had nothing but time to kill. It got on my nerves, as we say in America, and I was for stepping outside when he called to me. 'Better hang around out there for Li Kai,' he said. 'When he lands, bring him here to me.' It had me puzzled; but it's his game more than mine, so I obeyed. I had a pretty clear view of the yacht from the bund, and after a while I saw a little chap that might be Li Kai drop off her into a sampan and head for shore. Sure enough, it was the boy, and the story he had to tell may serve us yet in some way. It seems that a cabin steward threw up his job last night at Hankow and the yacht's master engaged a new one inside of an hour. There were no women aboard this run—he'd left the girls we saw at the tea garden behind with friends, I suppose—so the devil incarnate sat down to breakfast alone

and the new steward started to serve him. That was when hell broke loose. 'The Captain,' as the boy calls Lykoff, started to squeal like the great pig he is. The steward, thinking he had cramps or something, ran to him and began to chatter about what he should do. Well, that imbecile of a Muscovitish swine himself only squealed the more and tried to fling a plate at him. But he was too weak and a-tremble to fling it. It just slipped from his fingers and, breaking on the table-edge, fell in fragments to the floor. The master, hearing the row, rushed in; and Li Kai got the story from the old Scotch engineer who had it straight from the master himself. That cowardly reprobate of a Russian was in a state of terror beyond all believing. He was shaking like a creature with the palsy, and he was speechless. More than that, he was hunched way back in his chair; his eyes, starting so they threatened to fall out of their sockets, fixed on that cabin steward who leaned over him in a sort of stunned perplexity. The master couldn't make it out for a bit, himself. Then he took in the steward's face and he knew at once. You see he'd engaged him at night without any too much light, so until that minute he hadn't had a fair look at him. His face was spotted with coppery red patches. The skin was thickened, his nose and ears swollen till they gave him the look of a lion, and he had no eyebrows. The fellow was a leper."

OLD Fu Ting's visage wore an expression of pleasure.

"In desperate matters patience may do much," was his cryptic comment. The truth was that he had already heard the story from the lips of the leper who was in his pay and, even then, not very far off.

"Of course the master chased him, and in due time Lykoff came around," continued Young. "The first thing he did was to give the master his walking papers. Then he ordered that everything the steward had touched be thrown overboard. But when he saw the pieces of the smashed plate on the saloon floor he nearly had another fit. He had handled it after the leper. He had planned to go ashore early, but he's still on board. And he's soaking himself in vodka."

Fu Ting's hands caressed each other. "His enemy and my ally," he murmured.

Young went on to say that he took Li

Kai to the outfitter's shop and left him there with Nairne at the latter's request. "I came on here ahead," he added, "and they will follow. Meanwhile, O venerable and all-wise Fu, we depend on your superlative cunning to outwit this foreign devil and restore the beautiful and virtuous Tuang Kwei-hua unharmed."

IN spite of the narrator's effort at condensation the story from first to last had consumed considerable time. Prior to its beginning there had been an exchange of reminiscences which ate up more minutes than either imagined. So, when Fu Ting closed his eyes in meditation, seeking to be inspired by the departed spirits of his ancestors to the solution of his friend's problem, the better part of an hour had slid by.

They had retired to the rear portion of the shop and were almost totally screened from the street by some of the larger pieces of porcelain, consisting of great bowls of lusterless yellow or dingy brick-dust red, and tall, misshapen vases of dirty indigo or smudgy purple. Now, all at once, the low murmur of traffic in the narrow highway rose to a higher pitch. And Young, glancing between the bowls and jars, saw that a crowd was gathering. As he rose expectantly there came into view through the open shop-front a conspicuously decorated chair, supported by four half-naked carriers under great circular bamboo hats. It came into view and stopped.

The crescendo note had not been lost on the meditative Fu Ting either. He also got to his feet, but only to be shocked to a fixity that counterfeited catalepsy. For he recognized the chair. There was no other like it in all Kiukiang. Nor was there any other like that bulky bearded figure in the pale pongee and white helmet that was alighting from it, and then turning to lift to the ground that divinely lovely little Chinalady.

Young, too, for a moment was deceived. But for a moment only. Then his Occidental training, which had taught him how quickly to assemble the two and two which makes four, came to his rescue. The two and two were the outfitters' shop and Nairne looking at the suits of pongee.

All of this had occurred in the smallest fraction of a minute. For already the big man and the tiny woman were across the hong's threshold and the chair, breaking through the crowd, had gone off with the speed of the wind.

To Fu Ting his Americanized countryman spoke quickly a few reassuring words.

"It is my foreign friend," he said, "disguised as the devil. He is a man of strategy and fertile in expedients."

Not to be outdone, the porcelain dealer was prompt to prove that he too was a master of these things. At the touch of a spring, a section of what appeared to be the rear wall of his establishment, on which a portion of his wares was ranged on shelves reaching nearly to the ceiling, swung around on a pivot, revealing another room in the rear of equal size, where apparently he stored his surplus stock. Into this, with no loss of time, he directed his visitors, who saw that the articles here were for the most part of the larger sort used in garden decoration. There were great flower-pots of all sizes and descriptions, from shallow basins to deep jars. There were ceramic tubs in which trees could be grown, and pedestals to support bowls of trailing vines. The room was windowless and without other means of ventilation. Its illumination was afforded by a hanging lamp, which burned but dimly.

Nairne, to whose arm Rose of Gold was clinging with locked hands, spoke hurriedly.

"Lykoff is only a little way behind. He arrived at the gate of his place just as we started. Either he was sodden with drink or stupefied by surprise, for he could have stopped these borrowed carriers of his that I had, by a shout. Nevertheless we saw him start after us before we were out of sight, and he hasn't ceased to trail us. I suppose some of the crowd of by-standers told him what they'd seen. And by-standers have probably kept him wise since. Anyhow, it's a safe bet that he'll be here at any minute." His foot at that moment contacted a sunken iron ring in the floor, and he glanced down at it. "What's underneath here?" he asked, turning to Fu Ting.

"A well," he answered. "Very full. Very deep."

"That swinging bit of shelf wont deceive him," Nairne affirmed. "He ought to spot that at once." He had already removed his pith-helmet and was now detaching his beard of curled horsehair. "What I want," he went on, "is to get a fair chance at him with bare fists. The authorities wouldn't touch him. I know that. He has the native bunch under his thumb, and he'd easily hoodwink the foreign consuls. There was

no abduction. This little lady went with him of her own free will. She wasn't drugged. She only pretended to be drugged. He'd claim that he took her to his home simply because he was in duty bound to protect her. Yes, protect her from me. And he'd prove that I entered his house, disguised as himself, and carried her off."

While speaking the American divested himself of his pongee jacket and the mass of stuff beneath it which had given the effect of corpulency, and because of which he was sweating like the center man in a crowd at a Fourth of July celebration.

Young suggested that instead of coming here Nairne should have taken his charge to the American Mission. But Fu Ting shook his pig-tailed head in vigorous denial. That, he said, would only have delayed the inevitable.

"For years," he went on, "I have waited for this hour, when that Russian should enter under my roof. For vengeance upon him I long besought the great god Gautama. But Gautama is calm, peaceful and the embodiment of rest. He moves with great slowness. Then I turned to O-mi-to, the father of Kwannin, whose name it is only necessary to repeat to secure one's coveted desire. As today proves.

"Listen, then," he went on. "It is not well that any of us touch this foreign devil. He is cursed of the gods, and his hand is leprous. Because of what he did to one of mine so many years ago, his body and soul have been delivered to my vengeance by O-mi-to. In this storeroom are a hundred hiding places. Every tub, every jar, is a refuge."

He paused, turned his head just a shade, and bent his ear towards the secret panel. He had caught the risen murmur of the street.

"Now, quickly," he added. "Quickly out of sight, in the name of O-mi-to, who is of prompt beneficence!"

And with that, like a flitting shadow, like Harlequin in a pantomime, he disappeared through the pivoted bit of wall. But Nairne, watching, noticed that this time the panel swung quite about. When it closed, the porcelain-lined shelves were on their side and the blank wood of an apparent door must therefore be turned outward to the salesroom.

Another instant and the American had lifted Rose of Gold in air and deposited her in a jar which might have served as the death-trap of one of Ali Baba's forty

thieves. Then, swiftly, he rolled it behind another and still larger jar. Young huddled himself back of a row of enormous porcelain tubs, piled six deep. But Nairne, stooping, simply crouched in the shadows close to the hiding place of his adorable little Manchu sweetheart.

From the shop beyond, voices reached them faintly. One—evidently Lykoff's—was high-pitched and commanding; the other low, suave, and respectful. The one seemed to be questioning; the other explaining. Nairne strained to catch the words. Then a vagrant draft must have swayed the perfectly balanced door, a trifle on its greased pivot. There was visible a thin line of daylight and with the daylight came audibility.

"Listen, honorable and exalted one," Fu Ting was saying, softly. "The dog of a foreigner, made to look like your venerable self, went away swiftly in your chair which is like a chariot of the gods. But he left with me the precious parcel of a child that you seek. I gave him my lying word to preserve her safe for him, because I mistook him for your distinguished self. I have her beneath my poor room beyond, the insignificant door of which you behold. Permit me to leave your exalted presence for but a moment and I—"

But here Lykoff interrupted him. "Stop! I am no fool. You can't escape me that way. You say she is there. Very well. We will go for her together."

FU TING agreed, but with seeming reluctance. His storeroom was a poor pigsty, he said, and the cellar beneath it a pit of darkness. Permit him, however, to light a decrepit lantern, and the honorable one should have his heart's desire.

There followed then a minute of silence, save for the soft pad-pad of Fu Ting's feet, shod in slippers with rope soles. Next was a tinkle of tin as the lantern was taken from a nail. The scratch of a match and a yellow flicker crossed the thin strip of daylight, which almost immediately widened, only to be blotted out by the crowding through of the Russian's great bulk.

Fu Ting, lantern in hand, was at his heels. Nairne looked to see the panel close behind him. But it remained wide. For a second he wondered, and then wondered the more as he saw the figure of a slim Chinaman dart like a wraith through the aperture and lose itself in the shadows.

Fu Ting caused the Russian to halt at the edge of the trapdoor with the sunken ring for handle. And having done so, the dealer in porcelains stooped and lifted it. He had told Nairne that there was a well beneath—full and deep—and Nairne, believing it, looked to see Lykoff, suddenly tripped up, topple into it. But what happened was very different. Fu Ting, stepping aside, begged his visitor to go down first. This was made imperative by Chinese etiquette. Still it convinced the American that, instead of the well being just under the opening, as he had understood, a ladder or a flight of steps led down to it.

Not unnaturally the Russian hesitated. Did the fool think he was an ass to be caught in such a trap?

"Call her," he commanded. "I don't suppose you have put her in chains."

But at this the obsequiousness of Fu Ting dropped from him like the cloak it was. The lantern was in his left hand; but his right hand was beneath his blouse. There was a sudden flash of steel as that hand emerged. A glitter as the rays from the lamp overhead met the keen double-edged knife it held. His arm lifted and his voice rang out:

"Son of devils! Your parents and grandparents wait you below! Go to them!"

For an instant Boris Lykoff, taken by surprise, hesitated. Only for an instant, though. Then, as if to obey, he took a step towards the pit's mouth. But it was a feint. Before planting his foot he had whirled about with an agility that was indeed marvelous, considering his weight and build; and falling upon his now avowed enemy, imprisoned both his wrists in a huge and strong, if apparently pulpy, grip. Thus caught, Fu Ting's hold on knife and lantern relaxed, and they dropped resoundingly to the thick planking of the floor. But, for all that, Fu Ting did not yield without a struggle. He squirmed in resistance, and kicked viciously with the blunt toes of his rope-soled slippers. He did this even as the Russian, handling him as a bear might handle a stripling, jerked him round and half pushed, half carried him to the edge of the opening which yawned before them.

At the first sign of this encounter Nairne had bounded from hiding. Intent upon throwing himself upon Lykoff from behind and so getting a strangle hold about his neck, he had taken three long, swift strides.

But there he halted. Already he was forestalled. Some one was before him.

With a leap and a cry the wraithlike Chinaman he had seen enter the storeroom had sprung like a lithe panther upon the Muscovite's back. He had locked his legs about the other's waist, and with arms crossed above his shoulders he was clawing with talon-like finger-nails at the Russian's eyes. The release of Fu Ting obviously resulted. To end his own torture by the repulse of this new assailant, Lykoff, in a frenzy of rage, quickly relinquished his hold upon the other, employing his hands upon those of the assaulting Mongolian: forcing the crossed wrists apart and holding each outstretched at nearly arm's length before him.

FU TING, watching, and none the worse for his own experience, smiled calmly with a great satisfaction. He smiled and waited, foreseeing something pleasing. Nor was what he foresaw long delayed. Through tear-dimmed eyes Lykoff at length sighted the hands, now clutched by his own, which had mauled his face. And sighting them he went instantly weak all over. The vodka he had drunk no longer stayed him. His panic of the morning returned with redoubled virulence, completely sapping his powers of resistance. He let go those captive wrists as if they were of searing white-hot metal. He stumbled forward in an insane attempt at flight; in a mad hope of shaking himself free from the incubus more terrible than death that still relentlessly clung to him. For the hands he had seen, even with tear-dimmed eyes and under a feeble light, had told him their fearsome story. They were the same hands that had attempted to serve him with breakfast on board the *Sonia*. They were the foul, polluted, festering, infecting hands of nodular leprosy at its most contagious stage.

Another moment and the open trap, yawning wide, had swallowed both him and his burden. They dropped through it with scarcely a sound, feet first, and so straightly upright as barely to graze its one side. If a cry came from the depths the sound was drowned in the crashing fall of the door, swung by Fu Ting, who, foreseeing, had stood in readiness to drop it back into its place. It was Fu Ting, too, who bolted it fast with all the deliberative calm of performing an office many times repeated. And all the while he had not ceased to smile.

CHAPTER XV

THE experience suffered by Rose of Gold, though she had borne up bravely enough through all of it, exacted its penalty. Once safely in the shelter of the American Mission—whither she had been brought for sanctuary—cared for and sympathized with by the good women there, she experienced a prostrating reaction. She had as yet, of course, no tidings from her great-uncle, Prince Tuang. Nairne had told her of Dr. Carey's hasty departure for Hsi-Kyung's *yamun*, but with what result it was still too early to learn. With her own safety now assured, she dwelt with redoubled nervous anxiety on the perilous condition of her beloved kinsman. And when, late on that day of her arrival at the Mission, the good folk there proposed her removal from the weakening heat and humidity of city headquarters to their summer home ten miles above in a wind-swept valley of Lien-shan, she would not hear of it. On the following morning, however, she had a call from Owen Nairne, who brought her good news. A telegram had reached him from Carey saying that Prince Tuang was able to travel and that they were coming by the Yangtze line steamer due at Hankow on Sunday. To this Nairne had replied through the steamboat company's office urging them to continue on to Kiukiang and informing them of the entire safety of the young lady who was the apple of Prince Tuang's eye. Learning of the wishes of the missionaries to take Rose of Gold to the cooler heights of Lien-shan, he concurred with them fully and urged her to go.

"Meanwhile," he said, "Young and I have some business to attend to near King-te-chen. But we'll be back in time to meet the Prince and Carey and we'll all four of us—possibly your great-uncle's entire suite as well—join you on the mountain."

SO far as the suite was concerned, it had landed at Hankow, but Tuesday morning saw the reunion of the yellow-robed grandee and his precious charge in the American-fashioned gardens of the Mission in the mountain valley, with the big and handsome Owen Nairne and the gray-mustached and imperialed Young as chief witnesses.

Here in the peaceful quiet and cool loveliness of this bit of hill country all four of them sojourned for the better part of a

fortnight which sped on winged feet. The Prince, who was a most democratic old gentleman, found much to talk about with the more-widely traveled Young, and, with that leisurely spirit of procrastination common to his race, put aside all thought of the business that had so short a time ago called him so imperatively to Hongkong. Rose of Gold and Nairne left thus together found the long days all too short for their exchange of experiences and sentiments. They had discovered an arboreal retreat on the edge of a purling mountain brook, shaded by the arching boughs of great trees and carpeted with velvet moss. Here they were wont to retire with a book, idly chosen from the mission library, but rarely opened, much less read. For Nairne's only books then worth reading, he thought were, like those of Tom Moore, in a woman's looks. Yet he would not believe that naught but folly lay in their teaching. What was difference of race to him? Love made all things possible, he declared. Love believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth.

"That," he said to her, "these good missionaries teach. So why should we hesitate?" And Rose of Gold would laugh prettily as she answered him: "We shouldn't. I don't. It's only you, and my fear that you might regret."

Then he would take her, yielding, into his arms and hold her very close, and press his lips to hers in a long passionate kiss that thrilled them both to their finger-tips.

BUT there were times when they talked of other things than love. They talked of the night attack on Hsi-Kyung's *yamun*, and their strange meeting, and of her interview with the mandarin and whether it was possible for him to have been in a plot with Lykoff for her abduction. Nairne was sure of it. Dr. Carey before returning to Hankow had told him as much. Only through Hsi-Kyung's offices could Prince Tuang Wah-Sing have been drugged into stupor. For his wound was nothing at all. "But he was my great-uncle's friend," she objected. "Yes, I know. But Lykoff evidently was *his* friend," the American answered. "He had done him great favors and so got him in his power." Nairne had learned that the corruption of mandarins in this way is very common in China.

They talked too of that afternoon in the kiosk in Hsi-Kyung's garden, of Lykoff's coming when Nairne saw him for the first

time, and of his persuasion. And then of the messenger in blue who called her away, and of the riddle Nairne had propounded and of which she had not yet had the answer.

"The riddle?" he asked. He had forgotten it. So she repeated it:

"That man in Hankow
Has a secret I vow:
A secret some hundred years old.
It has nothing to do
In the slightest with you;
Yet the answer is—What?—Rose of Gold."

NAIRNE, laughing, pressed warmly the little hand he was holding. The man, he told her, was Young. And the secret was an ancient glaze, a supposedly lost art, that the French called *Rose d'Or*. A beautiful golden glaze that no modern porcelain maker had ever been able to duplicate. Young had the address of an old potter, living near King-te-chen, to whom the secret had been handed down through many generations, but who treasured it as a miser does gold coin.

"It was he that we went to see when I left you to come up here. His name is Yat Sing and his years are over a hundred. The getting was not so difficult as we expected. Things had not been going well with him. He and his sons and his sons' sons and grandsons, were in direst poverty. We bought the secret, paying him twice what he asked, and now he will die happy. I cabled the good news to my father in New York."

One day she asked him: "Do you suppose Lykoff and that leper of Fu Ting's were killed by their fall into the cellar?"

"Possibly," he answered, for he did not wish to horrify her by telling what he had heard—through Young—that on the night following their experience there had been a celebration of great rejoicing at the porcelain dealer's hong in the Street of Seven-fold Blessings. All of Fu Ting's family were present. It was held in the cellar under the storeroom, and the unparalleled feature of it was the *lingchi*, or lingering death, in which tragic drama Boris Lykoff played the leading part.

Even then, had he but known it, a drama, less tragic only in kind and degree, was in the making for Rose of Gold and himself. For on the morrow there came to him a delayed cable of congratula-

tions from his father. Yet not solely congratulatory. It contained news and what was practically a command.

From the first it had been Nairne's cherished idea to establish near King-te-chen, a plant for the production of porcelain of rare design and the still rarer *Rose d'Or* coloring, which should be under the direction and management of Young and himself. For he had seen that Rose of Gold, though quite willing to marry him, secretly dreaded the facing of his family and friends in America. By this means he would be able to make his home here permanently, in her own country, where her superiority of birth and breeding were better understood.

He handed it to her.

"Heartiest congratulations," she read. "I'm tremendously proud of you. But you must make me still prouder. Congress to-day declared war on Germany."

When she looked up from the cable there seemed not a drop of blood left in her face. Yet her eyes and lips smiled.

"You will go, of course," she said, taking his hand.

"Of course," he answered quietly. "At once."

THEN, for a little, neither spoke. Their thoughts were too big and tumultuous for utterance. Presently, though, she said:

"That was why I was going back to Changsha. Because of this war. They're making up a Red Cross unit there. Love nearly stopped me. But duty is greater than love."

Nairne buried his face in his hands. When he again looked at her there was less of misery in his gaze. He hesitated to speak, but subconsciously she caught his thought—his question.

"Owen!" It was barely a whisper. "I know. Yes, if you wish. We'll be married before parting; here, today, in the mission chapel."

"Darling!" he cried, catching her up in that strong yet tender embrace she adored, and kissing her again and again. "My darling! My Rose of Gold!"

The brook murmured its little pæan of approbation; the leaves overhead whispered to the light breeze their gladness; and the sunshine, finding its way, here and there through the thick foliage, poured over them a rain of dancing golden drops.

What the Old Timer said to Charley

by
C.L. Hardy



“ONLY a few years ago, Charley, the man whose name you see on that door was just where you are today.

“I remember the day he came to work for us. He didn't know much about the business. But he was always asking questions—always anxious to learn.

“And by and by we got to noticing that Billy Stevens was getting ahead of some of us old fellows who had been around here for years.

“I can remember as clearly as though it were yesterday, the day Billy showed old Tom Harvey how to figure out the pitch of some new bevel gears we were making on an important contract.

“Tom told me afterward how respectful Billy was—nothing fresh, or ‘I know it all’ about him. He just made a suggestion and showed Tom a quicker way to start the problem and a shorter, surer way to finish it.

“One day I said to him—‘Where'd you get hep to all that fancy figuring, Bill?’ We were eating lunch and he was reading some little book he always carried. He looked up at me and said innocently: ‘Oh, I just picked it up!’ I knew different than that, so I quizzed him until he told me the whole story.

“‘Did you ever notice the old men around the shop,’ he asked—‘the men with families who drudge along day in and day out—never getting anywhere?’ I admitted that I had noticed quite a lot of them.

“‘Well,’ he said ‘I made up my mind I wasn't going to spend my whole life in a humdrum job at small wages. So I took a home-study course with the International Correspondence Schools that would give me special training for this business.

“‘I tell you frankly that I never dreamed it would be so fascinating and so helpful in my work. I'm making mighty good money—twice as much as formerly—and I'm going to have even a bigger job around here some day.’

“Well, Charley, that boy went straight on up. The members of the firm heard about his studying in his spare time and encouraged him to keep on. You see where he is today.

“And I—I'm still plugging along at the same old job—struggling to make both ends meet. I had just as good a chance as Billy Stevens, but I let it slip by. Yes, I let it slip by.

“Now, Charley, you've got to want your training bad enough to go get it. That's as far as I can help you; you've got to do the rest yourself.

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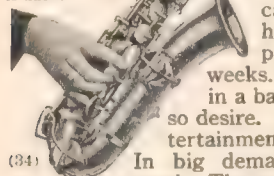
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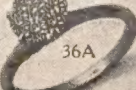
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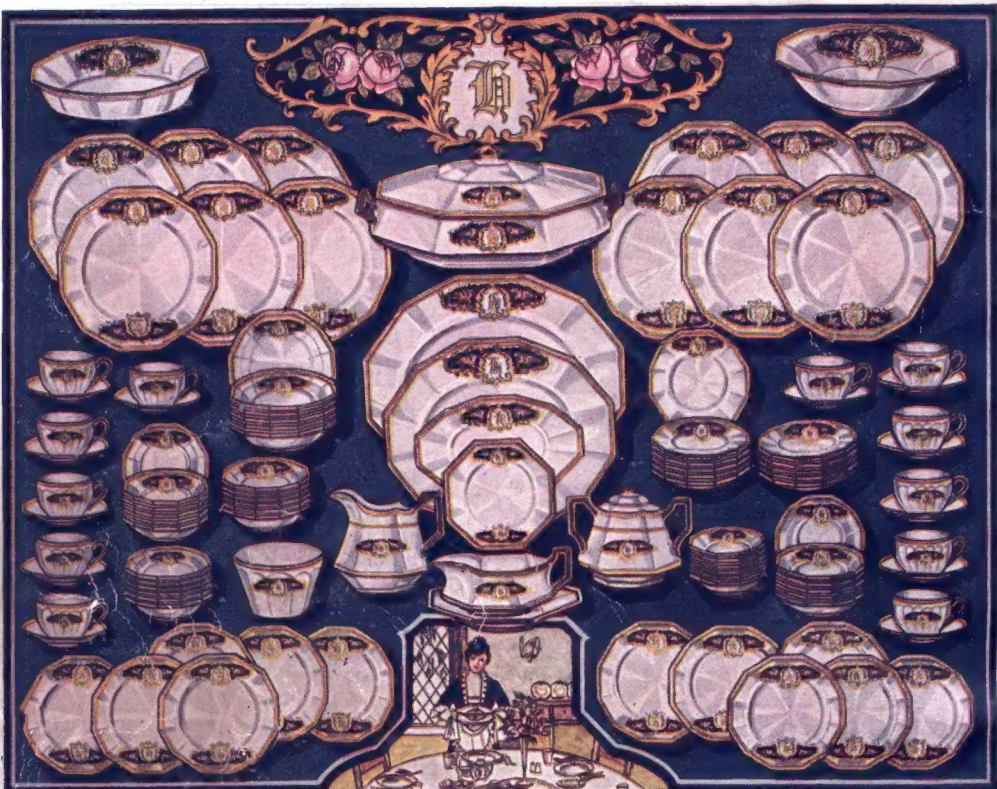
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